

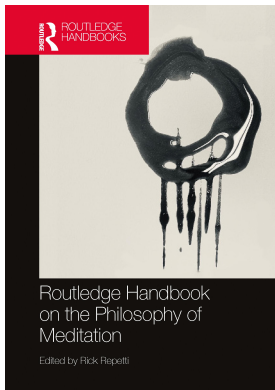
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THE NECESSITY OF MEDITATION IN UPANIṢADIC *TURĪYA* AND YOGĀCĀRA *AMALA VIJÑANA*

Charu Thapliyal

1 Introduction

The Upaniṣadic tradition (within orthodox Vedic philosophy, the philosophical system rooted in the ancient orthodox Indian scriptures, the Vedas, the latter works of which constitute the *Upaniṣads*) and the later Yogācāra Buddhist tradition (often referred to as a ‘consciousness-only’, ‘mind-only’, or, in Western philosophical terms, idealist philosophy) both describe philosophical systematizations of consciousness that imply that states of consciousness and their modes of awareness are qualitatively measurable and philosophically evaluable. In this chapter, I compare these systems to support the conclusion that meditation is essential to both philosophies, as two separate but similar traditions that evidence the overall premise of this *Handbook* – that meditation is a valid element of philosophy.¹

Toward this end, first I discuss the four stages of consciousness depicted in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (Gambhirananda 1979; Nikhilananda 2015; Rama 1982), culminating in the *turīya* state, construed as the core of pure awareness lying beneath and always present within the other three, ostensive states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and dreamless. Then I analyze the nine levels of consciousness identified in the Yogācāra school, culminating in the ‘*amala-vijñana*’ state, similarly construed as a foundational substratum for all other states of consciousness. Next, using scriptural evidence, I argue that knowledge of the true nature of the self, depicted in the Upaniṣadic tradition as the ‘Self’, begins by the Self, and cannot be imparted at the ultimate level by any external source. As a limited self, one cannot adequately describe or demonstrate it. It is something that can only be experienced, and the way to do this is to train the mind to become aware of the fact that you are conscious (consistent with the descriptions of both Upaniṣadic and Yogācāra traditions’ ways of construing base consciousness) through the practice of meditation. From this most general perspective on these two Indian philosophical traditions alone, that is, before we consider these two systems in any detail, it is clear that meditation is considered essential towards the attainment of the highest philosophical wisdom.

I speak from *within* the perspective of both traditions, which take certain metaphysical assumptions, e.g., about the primacy of consciousness over that of materiality, for granted. Thus, I do not argue for these assumptions. Rather, the point of this chapter is to set out the more specific philosophical frameworks of these two systems, to contextualize the claim that, within these

systems, meditation plays not only a central role in the attainment of the highest philosophical wisdom, namely, enlightenment, but is a *sine qua non* for the attainment of enlightenment in both systems. Whether one considers these claims cogent, as with any other philosophical claims, is one thing, but whether such claims are valid philosophical claims is another. I believe they are valid philosophical claims, regardless of whether they can be demonstrably proven, and thus that they constitute a significant contribution from the ancient Indian philosophical tradition to the philosophy of meditation as it is being developed in the contemporary Western philosophical tradition.

2 The perennial search for deeper meaning, truth, reality

Human beings have always endeavored to be liberated from the constraints of physical existence. Once elevated from base needs, we ponder, naturally, the vast external universe, but we also gaze inward. Consciousness and its manifestations are the most intriguing pursuits philosophers, scholars, and now scientists have been trying to unravel.

The Indian subcontinent is home to some of the earliest civilizations and the birthplace of some of the most renowned thinkers, however hitherto unnoticed in the West until recently. Throughout the Indian tradition we find a need to understand consciousness and its layered functioning, from the gross empirical level to the possibility of self-realization at the ultimate level. From Cārvāka materialism to Advaita Vedānta nondualism, all Indian philosophical traditions provide their understanding of consciousness as available to the ordinary human mind.

Bina Gupta (2003) shows how in the Indian philosophical tradition, consciousness research began by looking for an external object of worship in deities,² but later turned towards the inner principle, which became the object of contemplation, and contemplation became a form of worship. Consciousness becomes the bridge between internal and external, when one says, ‘I am That’ or ‘You are that Being’ (when one embraces the nondual perspective in which consciousness is no different from the outer deity; alternately put, the individual soul, the *Ātman*, is identical to the collective, cosmic soul, the divinity, Brahman).

This brings to light a central intrigue, directed at both the external and internal: How can I know myself if I don’t know the other? More importantly, without the other, can I perceive ‘I’? Where do ‘you’ end and ‘I’ begin? A deeper question arises: “What am I?” Thus, there is an interdependence between self and reality, and, from the Upaniṣadic/Vedantic and the Yogācāra Buddhist traditions, the result is an indescribable, indeterminate, eternal pure Being (*id.*).

In the first section to follow, I address one text from the Upaniṣadic tradition (and some commentaries on it), the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (Gambhirananda 1979; Nikhilananda 2015; Rama 1982), and the four stages of consciousness mentioned therein culminating in the *turiya* state. In the subsequent section, I explore the *amala vijñāna* state as described in one text from the Buddhist tradition, the *Chuan Shih Lun* (Paul 1984). One major self-reflection technique both traditions prescribe is meditation. Thus, in the subsequent section I compare the two traditions and critically analyze the role of meditation in the acquisition and understanding of both states.

3 The Vedas, the Upaniṣads, and the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

The Vedas were passed down many generations through the oral tradition of the *guru-sisya paramparā* (master-disciple tradition) before being transcribed. The eternal laws of life and the universe (*Sanātana Dharma*)³ are believed to be laid down in these texts, which are considered eternal, authorless, revelatory cosmic truths. Since the knowledge through which they were written is intuitive, it is considered self-evident and complete.⁴

There are 108 *Upaniṣads* – 108 is a mystical number in Hinduism, representing 108 beads on the Hindu *mala* (rosary), each representing an element of divinity – from which Śaṅkara has given his commentary on the 11 principal *Upaniṣads*. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* is a late *Upaniṣad*, which dates from the common era of Buddhist and Vedic scriptures and forms part of the *Atharva Veda*. This *Upaniṣad* itself contains 12 verses. We will be examining the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (Rama 1982), together with commentary by Śaṅkara (Gambhirananda 1979) and the *Kārikā* (commentary) by Gauḍapāda (the teacher of Govinda, Śaṅkara's teacher) (Nikhilananda 2015).

The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* presents a nondualistic view, or Advaita (Sanskrit: 'dvaita' = dualism, 'advaita' negates 'dvaita'). Unlike earlier Vedic scriptures, the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* does not contain any prescriptions for any rituals, prayers, or sacrifices, but only gives a succinct discussion of ultimate reality. Nevertheless, in the first few verses, the significance of the syllable 'AUM' is explained through the three levels of consciousness which it symbolizes in this text. (This philosophy conceives of Sanskrit as a language consciously designed by the same ṛṣis (seers) who saw ultimate reality and vocalized it as the Vedas, in which vision each sound, letter, syllable, and word has a meaning corresponding to a deeper metaphysical reality, emanating from that same eternal set of laws of life and the universe, the *Sanātana Dharma*. As we shall see, this conception plays a significant role in the articulation of this philosophy.) Later, these three states are shown to merge in the fourth state of *turiyā*, which is considered the level of absolute reality. The Sanskrit symbol for 'AUM' has been used to convey the conception of ultimate reality as beyond space, time, and causation. Thus, to make it easier to comprehend by commoners, a symbol was used.

The *Brhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* are the two *Upaniṣads* that stop their enquiry at the three levels of consciousness. However, the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* goes on to postulate a fourth state of consciousness and ultimate reality as a higher Self beyond all these states but which encompasses them all.

3.1 Four levels of consciousness culminating in the turiya state

The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* proclaims the three cardinal doctrines of Vedānta in the second *śloka* (verse): (a) that the universe is Brahman (the ultimate reality), (b) that the Self is Brahman, and (c) that the Self has four states of existence. Consciousness is deemed to have four states, since ultimate reality, Brahman, is experienced at four levels. These four levels are then explained in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (Rama 1982) and in the *Māṇḍūkya Kārika* by Gauḍapāda (Nikhilananda 2015). In what follows, I describe these understandings as construed as facts discernible by observation and inference from within the system.

3.1.1 The waking state: *Viśva*

The waking state, *viśva*, is a state of subject-object duality. The one experiencing is the subject, while everything else is the object. In this state, the ego experiences itself as the subject. This is an important level of consciousness, as it enables self-consciousness. This is the *Virāt*, the cosmic Self, or *Vāisvanara*, presented to us in the waking state, symbolized with the letter 'A' of 'AUM'. The reason behind this is two points of resemblance: pervasiveness and beginning (Nikhilananda 2015, p. 71). Just as all the sounds are pervaded by 'A' (representing base vibration/sound), no articulate sound can be produced without opening the mouth, and the first sound produced is 'A', similarly, the entire universe is pervaded by the *Vāisvanara*, and all knowledge of all other states is possible only from the waking state. Just like the letter 'A' has a beginning, so does the

Vaisvanara. Just like no other sound precedes 'A', similarly, the waking state precedes the dream and dreamless states. Much importance has been given to the waking state, since it is through the waking state alone that all the other states can be understood (*id.*, p. 72).

3.1.2 The dream state: *Tajjasa*

The dreaming state is a storehouse of the impressions in the unconscious mind gathered during the waking state. Whatever objects there are in the dream state are subtle impressions left by the objects of the waking state. It is possible to integrate both states.

Upon remembering a dream as one wakes up, one merges the self-awareness of the dreaming state with the self-awareness of the waking state. As awareness is increased in the waking state, it also increases in the dream state, and we can not only remember our dreams, but become a witness and sometimes even an active participant in the dream, what modern Western psychology describes as 'lucid dreaming' (realizing one is dreaming without waking up).

The dream state is more subtle than the waking state, and is symbolized by the letter 'U' of 'AUM'. The reason behind this is that there are two points of resemblance: superiority and being in the middle (Nikhilananda 2015, p. 73). Just as the letter 'U' coming after 'A' may be said to be superior to 'A' (in its subtler vibratory/auditory qualities), similarly, *tajjasa* coming after *visva* may be said to be superior to it in this sense: It is associated with the subtler objects of *ideas* in the dream state, while *visva* is associated with the more gross objects of physical forms in the waking state. Also, just as the letter 'U' is in the middle of the letters 'A' and 'M', similarly, *tajjasa* is between *visva* and *prajñā*.

3.1.3 The dreamless state: *Prajñā*

The third state, *prajñā*, is a state of blissful, dreamless, deep sleep where the waking self and dreaming self are inactive. What remains is only an inner controller regulating the various vital functions of the body at the subconscious level.

Prajñā is finer than the dream state. This state is considered a gateway between the two states of *jāgrat* (waking) and *svapna* (dreaming). Unlike both other states, there is no subject-object distinction here. Thus, the *prajñā* state experiences the 'blissful objects' (*id.*, p. 74), although since it is not subject-object differentiated, the use of term 'objects' here is figurative. Although one experiences this state constantly, one is unaware of it consciously. It is different from the waking and dream states, as there is no subject nor object, nor any desire, in this state. Deep sleep is compared to *prajñā* (homonym: wisdom, intelligence, understanding), understood in this tradition as also inherently blissful, joyful, and tranquil, and it is symbolized by the letter 'M' of 'AUM'. The reason behind this is that both the waking and dream state are thought to appear from and disappear into deep sleep (*id.*, p. 74).

Therefore, *prajñā* is considered the 'container' through which *visva* and *tajjasa* manifest or arise. The fundamental natures of *visva* and *tajjasa* are considered known from the state of *prajñā*, as *prajñā* is their cause. Thus, *prajñā* is construed as the measure of the two states. Similarly, when 'AUM' is chanted repeatedly, the sound heard is 'MAUM' and not 'AUM', and thus 'A' and 'U' are said to merge into 'M'. Similarly, *visva* and *tajjasa* merge in *prajñā*.

There is arguably no causal connection between the three states; however, there is a relationship between the three states involving the running thread of memory. It is important to have this classification of consciousness because it is in the waking state alone that this classification can be fully comprehended. The fact that there are two other states, dreaming and deep sleep, can be known only during the waking state, and hence they become known to the waking consciousness (*id.*, p. 16). The perceiver of the three states is considered identical.

3.1.4 Turiya: The fourth state

Consider how Nikhilananda describes the fourth state, that of *turiya*, and how it differs from, yet is in some sense indistinguishable from, the other three states:

Turiya is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass all sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. (it is) unseen (by any sense organ), not related to anything, incomprehensible (by the mind), uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable, essentially of the nature of Consciousness constituting the Self alone, negation of all phenomena, the Peaceful, all Bliss and the Non-dual. This is what is known as the fourth (Turiya). This is the Ātman and it has to be realised.

(Id., p. 47)

It is only in the *turiya* state, as per Swami Rama, discussed below, that one can go beyond these other states. It is neither internal nor external. It is the state of Supreme Being, pure consciousness, the Brahman or *Ātman* (the Self) itself. Upon deep meditation and contemplation on the syllable ‘AUM’, the practitioner may experience the gross, subtle, and causal aspects of ultimate reality. The syllable ‘AUM’ is representative of all three levels of consciousness as well as the fourth state, *turiya*, beyond them all and symbolized by the silence after ‘AUM’, relative to which each of the other states is construed as analogous to a localized, spatiotemporal wave arising from and submerging into a boundless, undifferentiated, nondual ocean. *Turiya* is a state without any attributes, and hence it cannot be adequately indicated by a name. Seen truly, *turiya* is not the fourth state of consciousness in a way of hierarchy, but in a way of *explanation* only. It is the substratum in or of all other levels of consciousness.

Just as the idea of the misperceived snake ceases to exist when the real nature of the rope (misperceived as a snake) is revealed for what it truly is (a rope), simultaneously the knowledge of the distinction between the ultimate reality and the dualistic illusion (the rope and the snake) also dawns. We say, in this philosophy, that *turiya* is ‘not conscious of the subjective’, to indicate that it is not *tajasa* (the dream state). We say ‘it is not conscious of the objective’ to say it is not *visva* (the waking state). By saying that it is ‘not conscious of either’, we mean that it is not an intermediate state between them both. By saying it is ‘not a mass of sentiency’, we mean that it is not a condition of deep sleep (mere undifferentiated dreamless/objectless consciousness). By saying that ‘it is not simple consciousness’, we mean that it cannot cognize the entire world of consciousness by a single act of consciousness. By saying that it is ‘not unconscious’, we mean that it is not insentient, or of the nature of mindless matter (Nikhilananda 2015, p. 50).

Thus, having identified the quarters of *Ātman* with the letters of AUM, the seeker who realizes the sound and meditates upon ‘A’ will become *Vaiṣvanara*, the meditation upon ‘U’ becomes *Vāijasa*, and the meditation on ‘M’ leads to *prajñā*. The “amatra AUM is identical with Turiya *Ātman*” (id., p. 79) (the *amatra* was a vessel into which soma, the divinatory/revelatory elixir of the Vedic *ṛṣi* (seer/sage) was poured, and from which libations to the gods were made).

In this philosophy, an ignorant person is one who thinks he will attain enlightenment upon death, that only then will he realize his unchanging, eternal nature. Such a person does not understand the unchanging nondual Self. The phenomena of birth and death are also considered an illusion. The rope did not stop being a rope while it was mistaken for a snake, but only when the misapprehension is removed is it seen as a rope. Similarly, the *Ātman* is seen as *visva*, *tajasa*, and *prajñā*, but upon negating the *upādhis* (attributes, of the Self), the same *Ātman* is seen as *turiya*.

One standard form of this method of negating the *upādhis*, made well-known by the great sage of Advaita Vedānta in the contemporary era, Ramana Maharshi (1982), consists of a form of self-inquiry involving analytic/contemplative interrogation of the ordinary associations between our attributes and our essential nature. The practitioner of this analytic meditative technique considers any attribute normally associated with our essential nature, such as our face, hands, speech, personality, memory, dreams, waking experiences, etc., and asks in connection with that attribute, “Who am I?”, or “Am I this?”, followed by considering whether they would remain the same self in the absence of this or that attribute under consideration, were it to be removed, and the philosophy predicts and prescribes that the answer will always be “*neti, neti*” (“not this, not this”). What is left after all such attributes have been exhausted is the Self, the *Ātman*, experienced as the state of *turīya* that underpins all other states and attributes, and which, being nondual, is indistinct from Brahman, the One, ultimate reality.

This shows us that the real nature of the *turīya* state cannot be known until there is a removal of the *upādhis* or attributes applied to it. It is not the case that a new entity, *turīya*, is discovered or comes into existence after the negation of the *upādhis*. *Turīya* is ever-present (Nikhilananda 2015, p. 53), and hence available in such meditative states.

4 Yogācāra

Yogācāra (‘yoga practice’, though ‘yoga’ in this tradition refers to meditation, not physical postures) or *Vijñānavāda* (‘consciousness doctrine’ or ‘consciousness path’) is the school of Buddhism founded by Asanga and his brother Vasubandhu. The reason behind the name ‘Yogācāra’ is that the school declares that absolute truth can be attained only by those who practice meditation. When we mention ‘Yogācāra’, we emphasize its practical philosophy; when we mention ‘*Vijñānavāda*’, we emphasize its speculative philosophy (Chatterjee and Datta 1984).

Paramārtha was an Indian monk from Ujjain who went to China to preach Buddhism. There were many translators who worked to translate Buddhist texts into Chinese. Paramārtha is considered one of the most eminent, along the lines of Kumārajīva, 5th century, and Hsuan-Tsang, 7th century (Paul 1984).

Diana Paul (1984) discusses the relation between spiritual liberation and the structure of consciousness as seen in Yogācāra texts translated by Paramārtha. The trio of Yogācāra texts, the *San Wu-Hsing Lun*, the *Chuan Shih Lun*, and the *Hsien Shih Lun*, share the most distinct feature of Paramārtha’s thought, namely, the identification of a transcendent pure consciousness called the ‘*amala-vijñāna*’, aka the ‘substrate consciousness’ or the ‘storehouse consciousness’.

The *Chuan Shih Lun* (*The Evolution of Consciousness*) is a Chinese Buddhist adaptation of the *Triṃśīka*, by Vasubandhu, an earlier Indian Buddhist patriarch. Although some specialists regard the *Chuan Shih Lun* as a translation of the *Triṃśīka*, it is more accurately described as a prose paraphrase of the 30 Sanskrit verses in the *Triṃśīka*, together with liberal exegetical comments not found in the Sanskrit original. So, although it paraphrases Vasubandhu’s text and follows the same order of subject matter, it is probably better to consider it an exegetical and interpretative work, rather than a literal translation. I focus on the text by Paramārtha, not Vasubandhu.

To summarize the nine types of consciousnesses in Yogācāra, the first five levels are the five sense organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. How different and sharp the awareness of consciousness is at each level depends on how strong the sensory input is which is being received by that particular organ at that time. The sixth level of the mind integrates all the information received from the five sense organs and presents them as a whole. This can be understood to be akin to the Western conception of ‘mind’. For example, if I am standing in a garden and a beautiful smell comes to my nose along with the visual of a red colored flower, my mind is able to integrate

that information and tell me that there is a beautiful, sweet-smelling rose in front of me. For all intents and purposes, these six levels are where my use of the ‘physical mind’ concept operates.

The next levels involve the spiritual realm of mind. The seventh level is the ‘*mano*’ level, which can also be translated as ‘mind’, though its function is different from the sixth level. The *mano-vijñāna* is focused inwards, rather than outwards, and is concerned with the sense of self and ethics. For example, upon seeing the beautiful rose, it is my seventh level of consciousness which debates whether plucking the beautiful rose is something I should do, this being someone else’s garden. This level of consciousness relates to the thinking and the aware self which forms judgments about which actions to take.

The eighth level is the *ālaya-vijñāna* or substrate consciousness, the storehouse of volitional dispositions and/or their kinetic potentials (karma). This can be correlated to the unconscious mind in Western psychology. All the experiences of all of one’s lives plus the effects of good and bad deeds are stored here as karma. This is unlike the first seven levels of consciousness because the first seven levels cease to exist once the physical body dies. This level, however, is considered neither originated nor destroyed by birth or death. The term ‘*ālaya*’ comes from the term for ‘accumulation’ (of snow in the Himalayas). Spiritual phenomena are said to occur in this level of consciousness.

The ninth level of consciousness is the *amala-vijñāna* or pure consciousness, free from all defilements, impurities, and karma (Paul 1984, p. 115). It is at this level that the true self (not capitalized in the Yogācāra tradition) exists in harmony with the cosmos.

In the *Chuan Shih Lun*, verse I begins by describing the objective content of cognitive acts. It states that consciousness evolves into a twofold distinction of *ātman* (self) and *dharmas* (lower case: things). Everything is understood as a self or an object; both are objects of consciousness. For consciousness forms the relationship between itself and the world (*id.*, p. 96). In this view, the activity of consciousness is what creates everything as its by-product. Its function is to condition, to be a conditioner or conditioning power, to be affecting or constructing things (*id.*, p. 97). The mind creates representations of its creations which may be animate or inanimate objects. There is nothing which exists independent of consciousness. Everything is mentally conditioned.

For this reason, Yogācāra is often considered a Buddhist form of idealism, and is sometimes referred to as the ‘*citta-mātra*’ (‘mind-only’ or ‘consciousness-only’) school, although there are internal disputes about this characterization among Yogācārins (followers of Yogācāra). In the second verse, three kinds of evolution of consciousness are discussed (*vijñāna-parināma*). This is the classification of the three levels on which the nine-fold structure of consciousness operates, as discussed in the next three sections (*id.*, p. 97).

4.1 The *ālaya-vijñāna*

The *ālaya-vijñāna* is also known as the ‘fundamental’ consciousness, due to the ‘*bija*’ (seeds: kinetic causal potentials) of all conditioned phenomena dependent upon it, and the ‘abode’ consciousness, as the place where all the seeds rest. It is also the ‘storehouse’ consciousness, as the place where all seeds are concealed (*id.*, verse IIIa). Thus, it is the most fundamental of all functions because it is a repository for all hidden or latent impressions (seeds) bearing moral valences.

This structure is important in the evolution of consciousness because it represents the capacity of consciousness to manifest future actions depending upon past habits and behaviors. Functionally, it may be defined as the consciousness-activity that maintains particular behaviors, perceptions, ideologies, and conceptions. In Yogācāra terminology, the *ālaya-vijñāna* is metaphorically called the ‘receptacle’ for karma because it is the effect or result (*vikalpa*) of past karma in the form of ‘impressions’ (*vāsanā*) or habits, which condition future karma as seeds or stimuli (Paul 1984, p. 97).

Verse XVd emphasizes how, just like one otherwise undifferentiated mass body of water may contain multiply-differentiated particular waves, similarly, the *ālaya-vijñāna* is understood as the place where all the seven stages or states of consciousness occur in interaction with each other, each differentiated stage being akin to a wave that is not fundamentally different from the metaphorically oceanic consciousness.

4.2 The *ādāna-vijñāna*

The second level of evolution in the structure of consciousness is meant to ‘appropriate’ or ‘acquire’, so is named on this basis. The activity of appropriating, for ‘me’, ‘I’, or the ego, is what the function of this consciousness is based on. There is a sense of identity, which is considered false here, and the conceptualizations are interwoven with it through the *ādāna*. The existence of a person on this level of evolution is quantified only in terms of what he has acquired; these may be ideas, material things, etc. (Paul 1984, p. 98).

Verse VII explains that this ego-consciousness and its associated mental states are eliminated when one reaches the state of an *arhat* (enlightened being), when one enters cessation meditation without conceptualization (*nirodha-samāpatti*). Verse XVI states how the intellect (*mano-vijñāna*) is ever-present, other than in the six states of (a) cessation meditation without conceptualization (*nirodha-samāpatti*), (b) meditation associated with the third level of *dhyana* (meditative absorption) without conceptualization (*asamjñi-samāpatti*), (c) dreamless sleep, (d) drunken stupor, (e) unconsciousness, or (f) coma (*id.*, p. 158).

4.3 The consciousness of sense data: The six consciousnesses (*vijnaptir visayasa*)

Moving on to the third level in the evolution of consciousness, what we know as the six *vijñānas* (consciousnesses) function in both sensory and ideational processes. In this sense, we say that all sense data is mental. It is only when the three elements of the process interact that sensation or ideation takes place. These three elements are a sense faculty (*indriya*), sense data (*visaya*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*). What we take to be the objectified physical world of objects and people is nothing more than this process of the three elements interacting with each other in the evolution of consciousness. The way we see our world and describe it is based on our past experiences and linguistic limitations, which we use to describe the world we live in (Paul 1984, p. 98).

Verse XVII repeats the model found in verse I, that consciousness splits itself into a twofold structure, subject and object. The verse does so by discussing two aspects of discrimination, *vijñāna-parināma*, saying that the evolution of consciousness is twofold: discriminator (*vikalpa*) and the discriminated (*yad vikalpyate*). Since the discriminated object does not exist in mind-independent reality, the discriminator also does not, but consciousness cannot occur unless there is a sense object to be grasped. (Recall that sense objects are understood to be mental objects.) Thus, the principle of consciousness-only can be upheld (Verse XVIIc). This means that we dispense with the distinction between objectively existing sense objects and the mind.

The knowledge that there are no objects independent of the mind is the first step towards acquiring wisdom, in this tradition. This is followed by a rhetorical question in the text:

If one dispenses with sense objects but retains consciousness, then one can say that there is a principle of consciousness-only. But if both the sense object and consciousness are to be dispensed with, how can consciousness [of any kind] be maintained?

(Paul 1984, p. 125).

The response:

One establishes that consciousness-only temporarily dispenses with the sense object but retains the [existence of] mind. In the final analysis, however, one dispenses with sense objects in order to empty the mind.

(Id.)

The reason for this is that when both the sense objects and consciousness are dissolved, then the state achieved is the true nature or *tathata* state, identical to pure consciousness (*amala-vijñāna*). This shows identity between the *amala-vijñāna* or pure consciousness and ultimate reality ('Suchness'), which is the core of Paramārtha's thought.

4.4 The *amala-vijñāna*

To understand the *amala-vijñāna*, we first need to revisit the consciousness-only principle. This principle means to dispense with the dualistic differentiation between sense objects and the mind. Nothing takes place outside of consciousness. Defilements or the objective world do not exist here.

"Consciousness-Only" is defined negatively as the elimination of all anxieties, compulsions and attachments by means of the elimination of both the sense object and the sensing, functioning consciousness. The positive definition is the wisdom of things as they are, the activity of consciousness is no longer controlled by ignorance.

(Paul 1984, p. 99)

The state of pure consciousness or *amala-vijñāna* is achieved, again, when the sense objects are also dispensed with, to empty the mind, as opposed to the temporary dispensation of the sense objects but retention of the mind in the consciousness-only mode. For Yogācāra, there is no difference between objects and consciousness to attain knowledge. The only difference between consciousness and its objects is that consciousness can become self-conscious by taking itself to be its own object. The way that objects differ from each other cannot be said to be true of consciousness and self-consciousness as well. However, it is as dependent upon consciousness to be known as are the other objects in the world. This relationship is 'dependent in nature' (*paratantra-svabhāva*).

Thus ends the exposition of the three levels of the evolution of consciousness culminating in the *amala-vijñāna* or pure consciousness in the text, *Chuan Shih Lun*. Paramārtha is known throughout Buddhist history for this unique contribution to the Indian philosophical tradition (Paul 1984, p. 9).

5 Uniting the two analyses

For both texts analyzed above, the structure of consciousness has been explored and explained, with substantive similarities, and perhaps fewer substantive differences. The states of consciousness in the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad* culminate in the *turīya* state. The states of consciousness in the *Chuan Shih Lun*, however, culminate in the *amala-vijñāna* state. The ultimate reality for the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad* is Brahman, in the *turīya* state, while the ultimate reality for the *Chuan Shih Lun* is the consciousness-only principle, in the *amala-vijñāna* state.

In the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad*, it is clear that states of consciousness are changing, but still there is an unchanging and constantly present consciousness. A mere change from one relative state

to another does not warrant a change in the substratum consciousness, from which Yogācārin conclude that pure consciousness is real. The unreal nature of the three states can be inferred by negating their *upādhis* (inessential attributes). When all three states are seen at the same time, we see that this substratum consciousness itself is the ultimate (and the only) reality.

Special importance is nevertheless given to the waking state that experiences gross physical objects. For it is only in the waking state that the other states can be fully known and understood. Even the *turiya* state, which offers a bird's-eye view of all the other states, can only be accessed once a conscious effort is made to move from the three stages of consciousness common to all four. Even *svapna* (dreaming) and *susupti* (dreamless) are fully known and their true natures understood only in the *jāgrat* (waking) state. This categorization, too, is both justified and necessary because it can only be understood and expanded in the *jāgrat* state.

All the states are known to exist only because we truly know about them in the waking state. Someone who has a knowledge of these classifications of consciousness will not be fazed upon waking from sleep, nor while dreaming, nor in dreamless sleep, as he will be aware of nonduality, unlike anyone stuck in the illusion of duality. The nondual Self, being unchanging, does not 'bring about' knowledge of the nature of reality. Thus, from the point of view of the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad*, for our purpose, reality can be *apprehended* only in the waking state, by making the leap from the physical mind to the spiritual mind.

5.1 Practical realization of the absolute

One parallel that we see between both the texts is that neither talks about rites, rituals, sacrifices, or penances as ending the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Pure knowledge of reality alone can enlighten and liberate one from the bonds of mere material existence. The substantial reality of the individual ego is denied by both texts, though the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad* refers to the true nature of the yogi as the Self, by which is not meant anything other than the nonduality that is One with Brahman, the Absolute. One undercurrent in both texts is that this current life is full of suffering, and that life after liberation is the goal. Another similarity is that ultimate reality is considered indecipherable by intellect alone.

The Vedāntin (Vedānta philosopher) Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan (Patyiyang 2008) points out that both schools generally agree that the *ālaya*, a continuous changing stream of consciousness, has been too often contrasted with the unchanging *Ātman*. The *ālaya* is not just a superficial self, but a storehouse of consciousness revealed by meditation. Each individual holds within them the whole of consciousness, though they may be unaware of it consciously (Chatterjee and Datta 1984). Swami Rama describes Gaudapāda's *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* (*Commentary on the Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad*) as a 'synthesis' of the Hindu and Buddhist forms of *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) (1982, p. ix).

Both Yogācāra and Vedānta emphasize introspection and personal growth, and employ philosophical reasoning in their service. There are myriad techniques in both traditions for those who wish to evolve consciously on the spiritual path. And one pair of related techniques, easiest to adopt, is meditation and contemplation.

For the *Upaniṣads*, self-realization is not just intellectual knowledge of Brahman, but immediate apprehension of – that is, experiential acquaintance with – Brahman. "Knowledge as loving meditation is the means and knowledge as direct vision is the end" (Raghavachar 1988, p. 21). In such *Upaniṣads* as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya*, Brahman is characterized as *ānanda*, bliss, for this reason. More broadly, the Vedantic tradition generally describes the experience of ultimate reality as *satchitānanda* ('*sat*' is 'being' or 'truth' [these are not differentiated in Sanskrit],

‘*chit*’ or ‘*citta*’ is ‘consciousness’, and ‘*ānanda*’ is ‘bliss’: the ‘bliss of [nondual] consciousness/being [ultimate reality]’).

According to Swami Rama, there are two ways to reach the truth. One is through renouncing all attachments to thoughts, feelings, desires, etc., the path of renunciation (*vairāgya*). The second path is through performing all duties without attachment and renouncing the fruits of the actions, so that neither the fruits, nor the actions they result from, can create any bondage for the seeker, the path of karma yoga.

Shankara and other great renunciates believed in renouncing all one’s possessions literally, but aspirants like Janaka believed in living in the world yet remaining above. The followers of both paths can attain the fourth state, turiya, the center of Supreme Consciousness.

(Rama 1982, p. 7)

In both paths the seeker can hope to reach liberation only once he makes up his mind to do so. It is the leap to the spiritual mind that starts and guides one on this path to the highest state.

Though the knowledge of Atman is eternally existent, yet it is obscured by ignorance in the Jīva [living being]. The aim of Sādhana is to remove this obstruction. Thus Sādhana serves a useful purpose though it does not make the student attain anything new.

(Nikhilananda 2015, p. 4)

This sentiment echoes throughout both schools, both of which say that the universal Self, absolute Self, or highest consciousness is ever existent in the individual self, though, due to ignorance, it is covered and one fails to realize it. They also agree that, slowly, upon unmasking the individual self, layer by layer, one sees that it is not the ultimate, but there is an ultimate beyond what we see.

In the Upaniṣadic tradition, there is a strong focus on meditative techniques to attain this. As Krishnan notes,

This highest Self (the ultimate Brahman) is seen by the Yogins who have mastered the meditative techniques, entered into trances and developed the divine eye to have this vision of the ultimate reality

(2004, p. 99).

This has to be done, since,

In order to be aware of the Universal Consciousness, one has to transcend one’s own individuality, for it creates the barrier between one and the Universal Consciousness. All personal discoveries and knowledge are transpersonalized when the individual consciousness is expanded into Universal Consciousness.

(Rama 1982, p. 7)

So, essentially, to reach the highest Self, one must first set aside the individual self and expand the individual consciousness into the universal consciousness.

The mind can be brought under control only by an unrelenting effort like that which is required to empty an ocean, drop by drop, with the help of a (blade of) Kuśa grass.

(Nikhilananda 2015, p. 203)

This *Kārikā* (commentary) on the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad* demonstrates, with the help of an example, how a yogi can control his mind slowly but surely. Nikhilananda says that the yogi (meditation practitioner) finds defeat in every moment (*id.*, p. 203). When his eyes are closed, he can see no object, and while his eyes are open, he can see the manifest world, and in both cases he does not realize Brahman, but he must not let this depress his mind or heart. Constant effort is always fruitful in the end:

The mind distracted by desires and enjoyments as also the mind enjoying pleasure in oblivion (trance-like condition) should be brought under discipline by the pursuit of proper means. For, the state of oblivion is as harmful as desires.

(Nikhilananda 2015, p. 203)

This *Kārikā* states that it is not untiring effort alone that brings the mind under control. The proper means also have to be followed. Untiring effort without proper guidance is like seeking a black cat in the dark. To look for a black cat one needs a source of light to dispel the darkness to see the black cat. This source of illumination for the seeker is the right guru (spiritual teacher), skillful sapiential authority, or scriptural instruction.

Returning to the *Chuan Shih Lun*, the Bodhisattva path (the later Buddhist path) endorses a life led in the understanding of the relationship between the mind and the world, thereby eliminating false views and attachment. Someone who has knowledge and wisdom of the source of misery, attachment, and suffering operates in the mode of the *amala-vijñāna*. Meditation is considered the only way to realize such wisdom, since in every other activity there will be some degree of mental fabrication, conceptualization, or differentiation. Unless one begins to contemplate this classification scheme, one will not take steps to become aware of its different modes as a way to start the journey to liberating self-awareness. For Paramārtha, the *amala-vijñāna* is the true nature of the self, without defilements and attachments (Radich 2009). This state of mind is cultivated in meditation, and its end is buddhahood. Thus, in this way, liberation is inherent in the structure of the mind, and so is available and accessible to everyone.

In the *Chuan Shih Lun*, unless one removes the fetters of attachment to dualistic perceptions, one cannot enter the realm of the consciousness-only principle. The wisdom of Suchness, for a mind undifferentiated into cognizer and cognized, is transcendental, devoid of false discrimination. Upon entering this realm, both gross delusions and attachments to them dissolve. This is why the *amala-vijñāna* is called:

the “*anāsrava dhātu*” (realm devoid of outflows [from defilement]). It is the “inconceivable”, the “absolutely good and real”, the “fruit that permanently abides”, “transcendental bliss”, and the “body of liberation”.

(Paul 1984, p. 167)

Swami Rama says,

In order to comprehend the meaning of the Upaniṣads, one must specially train the mind and its modifications, because only a purified mind is able to comprehend the profound subtle meaning of these scriptures.

(1982, p. 7)

Only the trained, purified, focused mind can receive this wisdom once all defilements and illusions are removed. The way to do this is to train the mind to become aware of the fact that one is conscious and to cultivate that awareness through meditation.

Swami Rama explains how meditation and contemplation, although different techniques, are complementary: Contemplation (*vichāra*) is an intellectual/conceptual tool to infer/understand reality, but deep meditation (*dhyāna*) enables one to experience reality. Each reinforces the other. In the Vedāntic system, contemplation is done on the ‘mahāvākyas’ (the [four] ‘great sentences’ [about nondualism from the Vedas]: (a) consciousness is Brahman; (b) I am Brahman; (c) thou art that; (d) this *Ātman* is Brahman), while meditation is done on ‘AUM’.

Meditation is the second technique of Advaita Vedānta, through which one can become one-pointed, focused, steady, tranquil, and inward-directed. Swami Rama gives the example of a gushing river that produced a rich crescendo of sound as it moves on its journey to meet the ocean. But if we go back to the source of the river, we see that it makes no sound. Similarly, *turya* is that original state that is perfect silence and can only be experienced when one makes their mind silent, to be aware of this silence.

Meditation, along with an attitude of acceptance of the world around as it is at all levels, leads one to be free from situations that cause suffering and disturbances. Peace does not come automatically, even if one meditates. Meditation is only a tool which, when practiced consciously along with conscious behavior, leads to spiritual freedom. Spiritual effort leads one to a higher perspective in life without struggle.

6 Concluding thoughts

Meditation and contemplation are complementary techniques for scaling the spectrum of consciousness while in the physical body. Liberation is inherent in the structure of the mind; hence it is accessible and available to everyone. This realization is not available through the intellect alone, but requires direct experience to be fully uncovered and integrated into the psyche. Individuals who are self-disciplined will move steadily but surely towards enlightenment.

“AUM” – described in Vedānta as a mixture of four sounds, one representative of each state of consciousness mapped in Vedānta and explicated in detail above – has been widely studied and contemplated by scholars and spiritual practitioners, and is often used to symbolize ultimate reality. Not coincidentally, the Western ‘Amen’ is akin to ‘AUM’, in terms of their vibrational frequencies and meanings (Yogananda 1946); both are used to end many prayers in monotheistic traditions, and to both begin and end prayers and mantras in Vedic and Buddhist traditions.

One may wonder how this somewhat coextensive knowledge arose (Radich 2009). According to Vedic tradition, recall, *ṛṣis* (seers) ‘saw’ ultimate reality, but they also ‘heard’ this mantra, ‘AUM’ (or ‘OM’), the *bija mantra* or seed of all sound (Yogananda 1946). The positive effects of AUM mantra and meditation practice, and its importance in this tradition, are rooted in scriptures and countless lived experiences in the monastic record.

As for Yogācāra, a similar process is analyzed by Paramārtha. The primary argument in the *Chuan Shih Lun* is about the consciousness-only principle centered on the self-generating operations of consciousness. All things, including persons, originate from one source, the seed of fundamental consciousness. It is only when consciousness realizes itself as the ‘seed consciousness’ that it can become fully conscious of its true nature. Upon taking this step, the transformation of the seed-consciousness to a pure, seedless structure has begun. One needs to realize this stage (*yoniśomanaskāra*) before the realization of enlightenment is possible: It is acquired in all the stages of the path of insight (*darśana mārga*), also known as the stages of effort (*prayoga-mārga*).

The highest aim of consciousness, in these two traditions, is to be aware that we are conscious, via contemplation, and to cultivate that awareness through meditation, to reach enlightenment, the *summum bonum* of most Indian – if not most Asian – philosophies, almost all of which insist that meditation is the *sine qua non* for transforming ordinary consciousness into enlightened consciousness. These two philosophical traditions clearly illustrate the theme of this *Handbook*: that meditation counts, not only as a philosophical practice, but as a central one.

Notes

- 1 Though I focus here only on these two traditions, there are many others in Indian and, more broadly, Asian philosophy that also demonstrate the main theme of this *Handbook* – that meditation counts as philosophy. But I restrict my focus to these two traditions, as they constitute the main area of my scholarly research.
- 2 Perhaps this happened as an anthropomorphic projection of the intelligibility we sensed in ourselves onto an outer world that also appeared intelligible, not unlike the way the early Greeks may have viewed larger cosmic forces, such as the sun, sky, and sea, as powerfully magical beings, aka ‘gods’.
- 3 All foreign terms translated in this chapter are in Sanskrit, except for one Chinese text title, the *Chuan Shih Lun* (*The Evolution of Consciousness*).
- 4 Vedic philosophers generally assume these texts to be epistemically validated by their divine revelatory origins, not unlike the way Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars take the Torah, the New Testament, and the Quran to be similarly validated. See Persico (this *Handbook*, Chapter 26), for an example of this attitude toward the Torah, and Terry (this *Handbook*, Chapter 25), for an example of this attitude toward the New Testament. Cf. Kachru (this *Handbook*, Chapter 5), and Timalina (this *Handbook*, Chapter 20), for more nuanced approaches to the scriptures in Advaita Vedānta.

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