

Turiya: The Absolute Waking State



The Misunderstanding of Turiya in Non-duality

The term 'turiya', which originated in the Hindu traditions of enlightenment, is traditionally understood as a state of awakening beyond and underlying the waking, dreaming, and sleep states. Its defining feature is that it is experienced within the sleep state as well as in waking consciousness. Because it originated within a non-dual tradition, turiya has also been seen as an equivalent to the realization of the universal self. But the question is: Who is realizing turiya? If turiya is a conscious experience of the universal self, who has realized it? Unless we know who we are, we cannot know who realizes turiya, nor can we understand what the state of turiya really is.

In Shaivism, there is also the concept of 'turiyatita', which means 'beyond the fourth'. Turiyatita refers to the realization of 'Shiva consciousness', in which the distinction between the four states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and turiya is forgotten. This is an insightful concept, because it allows for the integration and unification of all the four states. But again, who is realizing Shiva consciousness? Shaivism had enough common sense to clearly state that a self-realized yogi does not *become* Shiva, but rather becomes *like* Shiva. And yet their affirmation of this distinction is something of a necessary evil, because only after the death of the body is the yogi said to become fully free by becoming Shiva himself. But why should we aspire to become Shiva when we have been created to become our own individual self?

Another interpretation of the term 'turiyatita' was given by Ramana Maharshi. He said that from a higher perspective turiya actually *is* turiyatita, because turiya is not merely a state of consciousness among others, but rather the natural state of the self that permeates all of the other states. He said that only turiya is real, and the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states are unreal because they appear and disappear.

It is commonly, and falsely, presumed in Hinduism that there is only one awakened state and that turiya is that state. The main problem with this traditional concept of turiya is that it does not take into account our holistic evolution. To become complete as a soul, one must evolve on several levels, including awakening pure consciousness, reaching absorption in the absolute, and opening



the spiritual heart. It is also often said that to awaken turiya, one has to realize the ‘I-consciousness’ of Shiva through means of self-inquiry. However, it is impossible to realize turiya through self-inquiry, even if were doing such inquiry for a thousand lifetimes.

How is Turiya Realized?

As we have said, we could generally define turiya as an awakened state that remains present during sleep. As was explained in the article "Samadhi in Sleep," it is conscious me that is the last part of our identity to remain conscious when we are falling asleep. And yet conscious me is eventually dissolved into sleep as well. Indeed, even when conscious me is realized as primordial me, through being fully absorbed in the primordial I am, it is still unable to resist the loss of continuity of its presence in sleep because it is not absorbed in its own inner core.

Therefore, in order for our identity to consciously pass the threshold of sleep, we need to realize essence-samadhi and awaken primordial I. Primordial I is the realization of our identity as the immanent I am within the kernel of essence-me. Essence-samadhi (which is another way of looking at the realization of primordial I) is unique in the sense that it is not a samadhi in the transcendent I am, but in the essence of who we intrinsically are, in the very heart of our me. Through essence-samadhi, we realize that the innermost core of the light of me is actually made of the original light of I am. Here, we realize the sameness of substance, though not of identity, with the primordial I am. Primordial I can be realized only when primordial me has already realized complete vertical absence, where it is absorbed in the primordial I am of the supreme god.

It is the conjunction of vertical unity with primordial I am and essence-samadhi (unity with immanent I am) that allows us to awaken the one who is able to retain its timeless, conscious presence in sleep. This twofold realization fulfills the criteria for the realization of turiya. However, the identity of primordial I must be fully stabilized before it can enter the sleep state, so that pure attention becomes fully locked in the immanent I am. This requires both the first and second level of embodiment. Firstly, pure attention must merge with the immanent I am, establishing primordial bare attention. Then, primordial I must reach a deeper level of self-embodiment through which the second, dynamic level of pure attention reaches samadhi in primordial bare attention as well.

The Three Modalities of Turiya: Waking-turiya, Sleep-turiya, and Transitional-turiya

We have now established a working definition of turiya as the union of two simultaneously experienced samadhis: essence-samadhi (primordial I) and vertical samadhi in primordial I am. The union of these two samadhis is what we call ‘primordial samadhi’. Primordial samadhi is not the same as the primordial state. It is primordial I in vertical absence, the samadhi of the fully actualized immanent I am in primordial I am. Only such a profound state as this can truly transcend the boundaries between waking and sleeping.

Having thus defined turiya, we can further elaborate that it can be experienced in three different modes: in the waking state as ‘waking-turiya’, in both dreaming and deep sleep states as ‘sleep-turiya’, and in the intermediate condition between waking and sleep states as ‘transitional-turiya’.



Waking-turiya

What differentiates waking-turiya from sleep-turiya is that in the waking state, the recognition of turiya is clearly reflected in our intelligence, and we retain a natural connection to our human identity. Furthermore, in waking-turiya, we experience our soul as a whole, and all of the centers of pure me are present. The advantage and importance of waking-turiya is that, here, we experience ourselves in a dynamic and multidimensional way. The waking state allows us to experience the state of wholeness by actualizing our complete soul in the context of our transparent human expression. Also, we should not forget that turiya must first be realized in the waking state before being transferred into sleep. The disadvantage of waking-turiya is that we are more limited in our ability to dive into the inner universe of the absolute I am, because of the need to maintain visual attention and awareness. This awareness requires a level of identification with the waking dimension.

Transitional-turiya is an intermediate condition between waking and sleep which is experienced at the threshold of sleep. It is experienced, for instance, when one is half-asleep in the middle of the night or when one is gradually waking up. The dimension of transitional-turiya is as important as the other two, and we should not underestimate it just because it is transitional. It is transitional because it refers to the state of change when one moves in and out of the sleep state, but it is also a valid state in itself. Transitional-turiya can also be experienced in meditation with eyes closed when one naturally comes closer to the sleep-threshold. The sleep-threshold is not just a passage but a definable state in its own right. It is a little known hidden doorway to the inner realm of the absolute I am, which is another name for the inner dimension of creation; the sleep threshold is the natural environment of transitional-turiya.

What differentiates transitional-turiya from sleep-turiya? In transitional-turiya, as with all modes of turiya, dynamic pure attention is in samadhi in the immanent I am, and there is complete union with the primordial I am. However, unlike in sleep-turiya, pure intelligence remains lucid in transitional-turiya, even though our normal waking consciousness, which includes the recognition of physical and sensory reality, is either partially or fully suspended. It is a fascinating situation and an important opportunity; it is as if one has died to the world, and yet not only can one clearly recognize one's existence, one also retains the ability to think, contemplate, and explore the inner realms of immanent and transcendent subjectivity. In fact, one can even journey into the mystery of the absolute I am.

When we are in samadhi at the sleep-threshold, the doorway to the inner universe is revealed to us. We can experience samadhi in the absolute I am in the waking state, but it has a very different quality because of our need to identify with waking consciousness; we cannot fully live on the other side or else we would become dysfunctional in the outer world. In this sense, transitional-turiya is more powerful than waking-turiya because all of our consciousness is internalized, and we therefore gain more force with which to penetrate the inner realm. It is also more powerful than sleep-turiya because there is no intelligence in sleep, where primordial I is merely in the state of transcendental rest. Waking-turiya is experienced in the world of the universal I am, transitional-turiya in the world of absolute I am, and sleep-turiya in the world of primordial I am. Within this, there is no contradiction: in all three modes of turiya, primordial I enjoys perfect unity with both the absolute and primordial I am.

In order to truly enter the inner universe, the soul has to pass through the final barrier of universal subconsciousness that stands in-between the waking dimension and the absolute I am. Normally, everything that enters the domain of universal subconsciousness is lost in the astral planes of



fragmented consciousness. So the challenge is to enter the sleep-threshold without becoming sidetracked in universal subconsciousness. To do this, one does not cross over the astral plane, but rather chooses a different pathway, one that avoids the trap of entering it at all. If one is successful in sidestepping the temptation of that daemon of the subconscious underworld, and thus avoids being lulled into the world of false dreams, the hidden gate to the universe of the absolute I am opens up.

Sleep is the doorway to the absolute I am, but this doorway is guarded by two powerful beasts: the beast of the underworld (universal subconsciousness) and the beast of universal unconsciousness. The first beast seduces us into the world of dreams and nightmares, and the second one takes our consciousness away altogether, dissolving it back into the matrix, reducing us to nothing. Subjugating or circumventing these two beasts is the only way to pass through into the inner universe of the absolute god.

Turiya with Eyes Open and Eyes Closed

Another important distinction should be made between the experience of turiya with eyes open and eyes closed. We have spoken many times about how opening or closing our eyes affects our consciousness and practice. For instance, with eyes open, the horizontal dimension of consciousness is naturally stronger, while with eyes closed the weight of consciousness drops more to the vertical dimension of samadhi, making the horizontal portal redundant. The reason for this is that closing our eyes (as well as lying down) invites consciousness to move towards the sleep mode, while having our eyes open brings us into the waking state.

It may seem puzzling that our relationship with universal consciousness becomes weaker with eyes closed, and in deep vertical samadhi, which is close to the sleep state, universal consciousness may even be forgotten. Why would we forget something as important as universal consciousness? The answer is simple: universal consciousness is the ruler of the waking state of this universe. As we move beyond the waking state of this dimension, we also move beyond the universal I am. And then it becomes the absolute I am which is the ruler of the absolute waking state of the inner universe.

The same principle applies to our experience of turiya. With eyes open, waking-turiya is immediately activated, while with eyes closed, we come closer to transitional-turiya. Upon closing our eyes, but before we reach the sleep-threshold, we experience a new modality of turiya that is in-between waking-turiya and transitional-turiya. Here, the experience is similar to transitional-turiya, but we still retain a connection to the waking state, and we continue to be more or less conscious of our surroundings. Similar to transitional-turiya, turiya with eyes closed is experienced in the realm of the absolute I am. It is an interesting situation because even though we are still linked to the waking dimension, the primordial I has actually fully shifted into the inner universe and now lives in the absolute waking state, in the domain of the absolute god.

On a related note, it is perplexing that the concept of turiya originated in traditions that were not in touch with the vertical dimension of the source. The realization of turiya is not a logical outcome of their path and practices. As is now clear, one cannot realize true turiya without first having established the foundations of the absolute state and the primordial state. So, how did the sages of the past realize turiya? The distinction between sleep-turiya and waking-turiya might offer some clarity on how those masters who did not reach the absolute and vertical dimension of consciousness could have attained turiya. Because of the special circumstances which occur during surrender into sleep, they could have entered sleep-turiya, even though they had not realized turiya in the waking state. In such cases, they may have experienced awakened waking



consciousness (such as pure consciousness) in their waking state, and then shifted into turiya while falling asleep. Alternatively, those who realized turiya attained it primarily through an evolutionary shortcut of grace, or attained a lower state which they mistakenly called turiya. But because they did not understand how they had ‘stumbled’ upon turiya or who had reached it, they could not give adequate guidelines on how to attain it.

Turiya and Death

How does the realization of turiya relate to reincarnation and transcendence? First, we need to contemplate what happens in an ordinary case of reincarnation. When a person whose essence-me has been solidified enough to continue its existence beyond death passes away, he is temporarily dissolved in the universal unconscious mind (similar to entering the deep sleep state), and is subsequently reborn from the universal matrix into a new body. This rebirth is in alignment with the intrinsic wisdom and purpose of creation, and the one who is reborn carries in his subconscious the evolutionary potential he previously achieved, as well as some of his accumulated tendencies. These may give him some pointers, or clues, to his past life and lives, but he will almost always not retain any memories of his past personal identities or any factual knowledge that he may have had. In Greek mythology, the dead were required to drink the water of the River of Lethe, which made them forget their past life on earth. They could only be reincarnated once their previous memories had been erased.

Even those who have realized a degree of awakening within the context of this waking state, but have not established turiya, will be bound to reincarnate into this waking state or one of a similar nature. If our consciousness is dissolved during sleep, so it will be dissolved in death, back into the universal unconsciousness. In other words, the realization of turiya is the only way to transcend the cycle of incarnation into the waking state of this universe, which may include other universes and dimensions which exist in parallel to our own waking state. On the other hand, if one’s consciousness survives dissolution in deep sleep, at the time of death such a soul will identify with and re-center itself in the inner universe of the absolute I am. It would not even be correct to say that she moves into the inner universe because she was already there before the physical death of the body. This is the meaning underlying Ramana Maharishi’s words when he was dying. He said, "You say I am going away, but where can I go? I am always here."

The only way to enter the absolute I am upon death is to be there already. This offers us an insight into the possibility of receiving transmissions of grace from masters who have passed away. Such grace can only be received from those masters who still exist in the waking state of this universe. Those who have moved on to the absolute I am would already be disconnected from our world, because to reconnect to our dimension, they would have to pass back through the universal subconsciousness. No wonder we do not hear of Buddha or Ramana being channeled or helping someone directly. It is true that one can be in the absolute I am in the waking state of this universe and thus bypass the universal subconsciousness, but to be fully on the other side, we must enter sleep-turiya or transitional-turiya. To reenter this waking state from the absolute I am after the dissolution of the body would require reactivating waking-turiya. And as we said, this would require us to pass through universal subconsciousness, which is the subconscious mind of our waking state. So although Ramana is still ‘here’, he is not in the here of the waking state of this universe, in the sense of maintaining awareness of our dream world. Rather, he is in the ‘here’ of the absolute and primordial I am.



Turiya and Life

The concept of turiya has always been linked with transcendence and with an underlying dismissal of the waking state as unreal. But what about its role in making our human life more whole? To live in waking-turiya is not to negate the world or our relative human destiny, but to become one with the totality of life. By awakening the primordial I, we actualize our own divinity within the light of creation, which is our essence-me, as well as actualizing the waking state of this world as the absolute waking state of god. Then, not only do we move beyond this universe, but for the first time, we can embody our human destiny as the luminous manifestation of primordial I am. This is the true and only meaning behind the divine avatars and gods that have been depicted through the ages. The individual god that walks on the earth does not descend here from other dimensions: he is born here through the pain of the spiritual path that is fueled by the unwavering devotion to the light of me. He is forged from within his essence-me through the fire of awakening and the water of surrender. He transcends the human world, but he also transcends the need to transcend, by seeing all of existence as the one god of primordial I am.

We have used the term ‘turiya’ to describe the exalted state beyond sleeping and waking with some hesitation, because this concept has been created to suit a very simplistic vision of reality. To say that a state is beyond waking, dreams, and deep sleep is not enough to reflect the rich reality of this spiritual realization. People like simple, geometrical, or numerical solutions so that they can create in their minds an illusion of grasping the nature of reality, a mirage of understanding. They say ‘oneness’, ‘duality’, ‘non-duality’, or ‘unity’, but they have no idea what all these concepts actually mean. Reality is not one state, nor two, nor three, nor beyond the three states, or even beyond the fourth. Reality is a rainbow of dimensions, the splendor of which can be seen only if we look at it with awe, love, and intelligence. Reality is a most intricate dance between me and I am, which cannot be grasped by the mind unless the soul enters and begins her conscious dance with the creator. Even if all is forgotten in this dance, one thing needs to be remembered forever: the secret doorway to the real world, the world so real that it is beyond imagination, is hidden in the most unsought and surprising place – in our me.

Blessings,
Anadi

Glossary of New Terms

Immanent I am: the original light of primordial I am hidden within the kernel of essence-me.

Primordial Bare Attention: the first level of intrinsic recognition and embodiment of the immanent I am; immanent I am awakened through pure attention.

Primordial I: immanent I am fully embodied by pure attention; the unity between primordial bare attention and dynamic pure attention.

Essence-Samadhi: the samadhi of pure attention in the immanent I am, where dynamic pure attention is merged with primordial bare attention.

Primordial Samadhi: a twofold samadhi composed of essence-samadhi and the primordial state;



the vertical samadhi of primordial I in primordial I am.

Turiya: the fourth state beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep; the deepest and unconditional essence of consciousness that can be retained during sleep; immanent I fully realized and embodied; primordial I; primordial samadhi.

Waking-turiya: the unique flavor of primordial I as it is experienced in the waking state within the context of natural human consciousness.

Transitional-turiya: primordial I experienced at the sleep-threshold, where the waking state is suspended but pure intelligence remains present.

Sleep-turiya: primordial I retaining its intrinsic recognition within the sleep state, when intelligence and self-reflection are fully suspended.

For a full glossary of terminology, please visit our website www.anaditeaching.com/glossary