

Turiya

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Turiya is spiritual wakefulness: the fourth and highest state of the soul. It is beyond *jagrat*, the waking state; *swapna*, the dreaming state; and *sushupti*, the deep sleeping state. The word “fourth” does not mean that *Turiya* is simply another condition alongside the other three. It is the state above them, beyond dreamless sleep, a state of high spiritual consciousness.

The Voice of the Silence gives the essential frame. The pilgrim passes through three Halls and three states into the fourth. Waking consciousness is bound to the world of sense and terrestrial experience. Dreaming is mixed with image, desire, and psychic impression. Deep sleep suspends the ordinary personal mind but is not yet liberation. *Turiya* is beyond all three.

H.P. Blavatsky gives the deeper metaphysical foundation in *The Secret Doctrine*. In high *Samadhi*, the *Turiya* state, the real One Self of man merges into *Brahm*. The disciple attains primeval consciousness, absolute bliss, truth, formlessness, and actionlessness, abandoning the illusive body like an actor leaving aside a costume. *Turiya* therefore belongs to the real Self, not to the personality that wishes to possess spiritual experience.

Professor Iyer gives the term its living contemplative meaning. Great beings, he says, are in ceaseless meditation, in the supreme spiritual wakefulness known as *turiya*. Ordinary waking is measured by functioning senses and responsiveness to the world. The teaching asks for another measure: whether consciousness remains free from the compulsions, projections, and separative identifications that continue even while those senses are active.

Turiya is not blankness, trance, or passive cessation of thought. Passive sleep does not liberate the immortal spirit. Deliverance requires *abhyasa* and *vairagya*: assiduous practice and dispassionate detachment. *Abhyasa* is the continuous effort to abide in a steady state; *vairagya* is lucid detachment while remaining fully aware of the relative significance of objects. These prepare wakefulness that is serene, exact, and self-conscious.

The distinction from *samadhi* also needs proportion. *Samadhi* has degrees in Patanjali's exposition, some retaining a seed or object of concentration. Blavatsky associates *turiya* with high *samadhi*. It therefore follows that every absorbed or peaceful condition should not be called *turiya*. The same word may receive a broader or narrower emphasis according to the text. Careful reading keeps the culmination in view without erasing the stages of preparation.

Nor should 'fourth' be understood only as the last item in a sequence of experiences. Professor Iyer explains that the four states are implicit at every level of consciousness. *Turiya* is outside

the ordinary order of the other three while illuminating their deeper relation. This is a metaphysical claim about consciousness, not a timetable for a night's sleep. The figure of four opens an inquiry into the ground of awareness as well as into its changing conditions.

Turiya belongs to continuity of consciousness. *Sushupti* may bring consciousness near inner noetic reserves, but most people do not carry lucid awareness through it. *Dhyana* dissolves the boundaries of the separative self and prepares unbroken continuity of consciousness. Then, as Professor Iyer says, the process of evolution is reversed, the illusory succession of events is shattered by insight, and spiritual wakefulness is eventually experienced.

Turiya is also described as the state in which spirit is at once seer and creator. Seeing is not passive observation. It is the shedding of spiritual light. In ordinary perception, the seer and the seen appear divided. In *Turiya*, consciousness participates in reality from its own spiritual source. This is why The Voice speaks of Light in the Sound and Sound in the Light.

The symbolism of *AUM* provides another approach. In a note to *The Voice of the Silence*, the syllable's sounds are associated with the wings and tail of the bird *Hansa*, while the *Ardha-matra* is its head. This symbolic completion accompanies the teaching about passage into the fourth state. It invites contemplation of what exceeds an audible formulation. Reciting or imagining the symbol does not by itself establish the consciousness to which it points.

This doctrine is inwardly practical. The student who studies *Turiya* should not merely admire the fourth state. The question is how to become less asleep now. Automatic speech, reaction, resentment, distraction, vanity, and fear are signs of discontinuity. They show consciousness being carried by the *gunas* rather than standing in wakefulness.

Professor Iyer speaks of *Turiya* as freedom from captivity to the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Even *sattva* is still a quality of *prakriti*. *Turiya* is not merely refinement within the *gunas*, but freedom from bondage to their oscillations. The student begins by watching the movements of dullness, agitation, and subtle pride without identifying with them.

Love too is educated by *Turiya*. Personal love often dreams through projection, need, fear, and expectation. Spiritual wakefulness asks love to see more truly, wait more patiently, speak more cleanly, and serve the awakening of another without possession. *Turiya* does not cool love into abstraction; it purifies love into lucid compassion.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception has a simple human application here. We may think we know a friend because we recognize familiar habits. Yet an attentive conversation can reveal a grief, a hope, or a capacity that our settled picture had excluded. Becoming less governed by that picture makes room for a living person. It is a preparation in truthful attention, far short of *turiya* itself, but consistent with the movement from projection toward clearer seeing.

This also gives reverence a practical discipline. To honour a spiritual possibility in someone is not to deny the harm that a particular action may cause. Conduct still needs discernment and, where necessary, correction. The wider conception holds both truths: responsibility for the act and the refusal to declare the whole being exhausted by it. Compassion becomes more exact when it sees clearly, while clarity becomes less harsh when it remembers the depth of the one seen.

Turiya is not private bliss. Professor Iyer says that those who have renounced the slightest desire for individual absorption and have vowed to serve the whole human race can remain fixed in the *Turiya* state even amid the delusive conditions of the world. Thus the highest wakefulness can become the ground of unseen help.

This binds *Turiya* to Human Solidarity and Universal Brotherhood. True wakefulness does not isolate. It makes one more aware of the suffering and aspiration of all beings. When consciousness rises beyond the dream of separateness, the common root of beings becomes more real than their temporary disguises. Brotherhood becomes an ontological fact and an ethical vow.

The language of wakefulness also asks for restraint in judging others. Quiet demeanour, eloquence, or unusual experience does not establish an inner attainment. Nor does a difficult season reveal the whole reach of a person's aspiration. The teaching is most fruitful when used to deepen one's own vigilance and reverence. Its distant horizon can give courage without becoming a scale on which to rank the spiritual worth of the people around us.

Turiya stands as the fourth state and the highest wakefulness of the soul. It is the spiritual wakefulness of the *Atmajnani*, the silent head of *AUM*, the light behind sound, and the state in which spirit is seer and creator. To contemplate *Turiya* is to learn to awaken within life: to speak more truthfully, love more lucidly, suffer more wisely, serve more quietly, and let *Manas* become transparent to *Buddhi*.

Glossary

Abhyasa — Steady, repeated practice; the effort to maintain a chosen state of attention.

Akshara — The imperishable; in *The Voice of the Silence*, the indestructible fount beyond the Hall of Wisdom.

Ardha-matra — The half-measure; the symbolic completion associated with the head of *Hansa* in the cited note.

Atma — The universal spiritual Self; a form of the term *Atman*.

Atmajnani — A knower of *Atman*; one established in spiritual self-knowledge.

Atman — The universal spiritual Self, distinguished from the changing personality.

AUM — The sacred syllable contemplated in connection with the states of consciousness.

Brahm — The Absolute or supreme Reality in the cited Theosophical usage.

Buddhi — Spiritual intuition or wisdom; the principle through which higher discernment illumines mind.

Dhyana — Sustained meditation or contemplation.

Guna — A quality or constituent of *Prakriti*; the three are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

Hansa — The symbolic swan or bird associated with the sacred syllable.

Jagrat — The ordinary waking state of consciousness.

Manas — Mind; the human principle of self-conscious thought and moral choice.

Manvantara — A period of manifested cosmic activity, contrasted with *pralaya*.

Mara — The tempter or personification of obstacles and illusion in Buddhist and Theosophical symbolism.

Prakriti — Nature or the field of manifestation, distinguished from *Purusha* in Patanjali's yoga.

Pralaya — Dissolution or a period of non-manifestation.

Prima materia — Latin for first matter; used here in the metaphysical account of seeing and creation.

Rajas — Activity, movement, or passion; one of the three *gunas*.

Samadhi — Meditative absorption; a discipline with gradations culminating in spiritual cognition.

Sattva — Lucidity, harmony, or balance; one of the three *gunas*.

Sushupti — Deep, dreamless sleep, distinguished from *turiya* or spiritual wakefulness.

Svapna — The dreaming state; also written *swapna*.

Tamas — Inertia, obscuration, or resistance; one of the three *gunas*.

Turiya — The fourth state of spiritual wakefulness, beyond waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

Vairagya — Detachment or dispassion, joined to discriminative understanding.

Yogin — A practitioner of yoga; *yogins* and *yogi* are related forms.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, p. 4.

“Aye, sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies, but is the *AUM* throughout eternal ages. Bestride the Bird of Life, if thou would’st know. Give up thy life, if thou would’st live. Three Halls, O weary pilgrim, lead to the end of toils. Three Halls, O conqueror of *Mara*, will bring thee through three states into the fourth and thence into the seven worlds, the worlds of Rest Eternal.”

Meditation thought: Let the journey through the Halls widen the horizon of study. Do not mistake the symbol’s beauty for the realization it indicates.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, notes on the four states, p. 4.

“The three states of consciousness, which are *Jagrat*, the waking; *Swapna*, the dreaming; and *Sushupti*, the deep sleeping state. These three *Yogi* conditions, lead to the fourth, or — The *Turiya*, that beyond the dreamless state, the one above all, a state of high spiritual consciousness.”

Meditation thought: Hold the four states distinctly in thought. What seems absent to waking memory need not exhaust the possibilities of consciousness.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, pp. 5–6.

“The name of the third Hall is WISDOM, beyond which stretch the shoreless waters of *AKSHARA*, the indestructible Fount of Omniscience. If thou would’st cross the first Hall safely, let not thy mind mistake the fires of lust that burn therein for the sunlight of life. If thou would’st cross the second safely, stop not the fragrance of its stupefying blossoms to inhale.”

Meditation thought: Test an attractive appearance against the purpose of the path. Attention requires discernment as well as receptivity.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 570.

“In *Pralaya*, or the intermediate period between two *manvantaras*, it loses its name, as it loses it when the real ONE self of man merges into *Brahm* in cases of high *Samadhi* (the *Turiya* state) or final Nirvana; ‘when the disciple’ in the words of Sankara, ‘having attained that primeval consciousness, absolute bliss, of which the nature is truth, which is without form and action, abandons this illusive body that has been assumed by the *atma* just as an actor (abandons) the dress (put on).’”

Meditation thought: The passage refers to high *samadhi* and release from identification. Let its scope invite humility about ordinary claims to spiritual experience.

5. R.N. Iyer — “The Self-Existent”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 23.

“Great beings have always shown how to tune oneself to the great heart of the cosmos. They are in ceaseless meditation at all times, in a state of supreme total spiritual wakefulness known as *turiya*. Even if most human beings, by comparison, are like lisping, faltering adolescents because of their inability to contain and continue thought and consciousness to a point where the boundaries are burst, this state of *turiya* is accessible to each and every person.”

Meditation thought: Consider wakefulness as a continuity of consciousness. A faithful return to attention gives the distant ideal a present direction.

6. R.N. Iyer — “The Self-Existent”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 23.

“Just as we took a lot of trouble to learn how to walk and talk, we cannot expect, without a lot of effort, to reverse all the habits of the imprisoning sensorium and the imprisoning finitude of embodiment. We cannot develop a taste for the sheer joy of the exhilarating experience of the Absolute without earnestly availing ourselves in meditation of the finest philosophical and poetical characterizations of the Absolute.”

Meditation thought: Allow philosophical study and poetic contemplation to prepare the imagination. Profound ideas deserve more than a passing glance.

7. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 128.

“Through daily meditation upon the Spiritual Sun, *Buddhi* is aroused and sheds its light upon the noumenal meaning of experience, the internal relations in human consciousness which are connected with the external conditions of material evolution. Hermetic wisdom bridges the gap between ideation, image and form, between universal Spirit and differentiated matter, between the cosmic and the human, between the abstract and the concrete.”

Meditation thought: Look for relationships that a fragmented account of experience has missed. Let contemplation deepen, rather than replace, careful observation.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 128.

“Meaningful correlations between noumenal causes and disconnected events are sensed in *sushupti*, dreamless sleep. *Dhyana* or meditation dissolves the boundaries of the separative self and prepares the awakened individual to attain unbroken continuity of consciousness. The process of evolution is reversed, the illusory succession of events is shattered by insight, and spiritual wakefulness (*turiya*) is eventually experienced.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish dreamless depth from conscious spiritual wakefulness. Study the discipline that the passage places between them.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Ascent and Descent”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 251.

“The last state — *Turiya* — is outside the order of the other three, and is that in which spirit is at once seer and creator, and where seeing is the activity of shedding the light that is the *prima materia* of creation. Since all four states are implicit at every level of consciousness, the perceptive mystery of creation is present in every dream.”

Meditation thought: Consider how seeing may participate in the life it reveals. Keep the metaphysical image open without reducing it to ordinary visual perception.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Continuity and Choice”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume II, p. 279.

“This is the point in consciousness where human beings as individuals could maintain a noetic and complete wakefulness — *turiya*, a profound awareness from a standpoint which transcends the greatest magnitudes of spacetime. It goes beyond solar systems and intimates that the depths of space represent in the very core of apparently nothing, a subtle creative gestation of matter.”

Meditation thought: Let a larger conception of space loosen the scale imposed by private concerns. Return to the immediate task with greater proportion.

11. R.N. Iyer — “The Pilgrimage of Humanity”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 100.

“Those *yogins* who have renounced the slightest desire for individual bliss or absorption, and have long since vowed to serve the whole of the human race, do not seek anything less than universal enlightenment. Fully cognizant of higher states of consciousness, they are able to remain fixed in the *turiya* state of spiritual wakefulness even amidst the delusive conditions of the world.”

Meditation thought: Place the welfare of humanity beside the aspiration for enlightenment. What present act can express that wider purpose?

12. R.N. Iyer — “Knowledge and Negligence”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 125.

“One is only partly awake when asking questions about the true Self; one is more awake when one actively meditates and even more awake when one ardently seeks the Knower of the *Atman*. The *Atmajnani* is in a steady state of *turiya*, continuous spiritual wakefulness. Total wakefulness is only possible on the plane of the *Atman*, wherein no distinctions made by the mind have any meaning.”

Meditation thought: Use the teaching to deepen vigilance in your own life. Let it discourage hasty judgments about another person’s inward attainment.