

## Chapter 5

### *You Are Your Awareness*

Having apprehended the transcendent Lord, Supreme Truth, free from origin and destruction, all duty completed, He dwells here below according to His wish because He has had the revelation of the state of the perceiving Subject.

Abhinavagupta, *Paramarthasara*, Verse 81

**L**ike most philosophies in India, Kashmir Shaivism is both a philosophy and a yoga. It is a philosophy of salvation—not just an intellectual system but also a method designed to attain liberation or Self-realisation. And so, it discusses *sadhana*: meditation techniques and understandings that are useful today.

I have said that Kashmir Shaivism can be summed up in one sentence: ‘Everything is *Chiti*, everything is Consciousness’. The first Shiva sutra, *Chaitanyamatma*, which I have already translated as ‘The Self is Consciousness’ can also be translated as ‘The nature of reality is Consciousness’, or, ‘Everything is Consciousness’. Let us consider that for a moment. It may not be immediately obvious that everything is Consciousness. Our culture is not predicated on that notion but on its opposite.

The normal Western position is that everything is matter. A scientist might say that at some stage of evolution, through natural selection and a random combination of amino acids, Consciousness occurred. This understanding seems reasonable in the West, though under scrutiny, I think it is wildly implausible.

Where does Consciousness come from? How does it come about? Is it a mutation? Once there were just a couple of rocks sitting around and then things started to boil for a while and suddenly there was Consciousness . . . and then here we are?

Shaivism says that Consciousness underlies all creation. It was there in the beginning, it is there in the middle and it will be there in the end. It is the fundamental stuff of the universe.

Now think about your own experience. Shaivism encourages us to move contemplatively from the divine experience to the individual experience and back. It says that if you want to understand God, then know yourself. If you want to understand yourself, then understand God. But always look to your own experience first.

So consider your own Consciousness for a moment. See how luminous it is. It can entertain any thought. It reflects sensory information. It governs your life. Consciousness is not ordinary, like a jar or a clock. It is hard for me to accept that it is the product of random mutation. Examine your experience of life. Is there anything apart from Consciousness that you know?

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, there is a dialogue between King Janaka and his Guru, Yagnavalkya:

Janaka: Yagnavalkya, what serves as the light for man?

Yagnavalkya: The light of the sun, Your Majesty; for by the light of the sun man sits, goes out, does his work, and returns home.

Janaka: True indeed, Yagnavalkya. But when the sun has set, what serves then as his light?

Yagnavalkya: The moon is then his light.

Janaka: When the sun has set, O Yagnavalkya, and the moon has set, what serves then as his light?

Yagnavalkya: The fire is then his light.

Their dialogue regresses through a series of lights, resolving itself in the ultimate and irreducible light, the light of the Self. That Self is the conscious heart of the universe.

Yagnavalkya: Pure like crystal water is that Self, the only seer, the One without a second. He is the kingdom of Brahman, man's highest goal, his supreme treasure, his greatest bliss. Creatures who live within

the bonds of ignorance experience but a small portion of His infinite being.

Consciousness is unique because every atom, every molecule—if you can talk about Consciousness that way—replicates the whole. It is a hologram of everything. ‘As above, so below’. Shaivism says, ‘As here, so elsewhere. As elsewhere, so here’. Everything is contained in the most minute part. Abhinavagupta neatly expresses this idea by saying, ‘Everything is the epitome of everything else’. Everything is awareness. Everything is included. Equally, the whole universe is contained in you. You may think, ‘I am a small creature’, ‘I am a separate atom’, but in fact the whole is contained in your awareness. I can understand the whole by understanding, in a profound way, the smallest part.

Shaivism, the Trika, focuses on three main universal issues. First, it inquires into the nature of Consciousness, the nature and oneness of reality and of God. Next it talks about contraction, the material world, that which separates us from Consciousness, and finally it sets forth the means of *sadhana*, the method that liberates us from suffering and returns us to oneness.

If there were only God, and no tension, then we would be sporting in constant bliss. Alas, life is full of tension and struggle. We may feel that we lack something that would improve our situation, or maybe we feel we have lost something that was necessary. Both conditions create conflict and contraction. As soon as Consciousness becomes contracted there is suffering. If we are Shiva, we are Shiva in prison. Shiva became intoxicated with His creation and managed to forget His true nature.

The third aspect of the Trika is *sadhana*, yogic practice. The great Shaivite yogis developed a methodology to get rid of our metaphysical bondage. *Sadhana* is the path back to our original condition, back to Shiva. It culminates in Self-realisation. Thus Shaivism has an interesting discussion of realisation and the state of a realised being.

#### THE CAUSE OF THE UNIVERSE IS CONSCIOUSNESS

Let us look at some of the sutras of the very useful *Pratyabhijnahridayam*, which means ‘the heart of the doctrine of Self-recognition’. (See Appendix B.) *Pratyabhijnahridayam* is a later text, not one of the foundational texts of Shaivism. It is the work of Kshemaraja, a disciple of Abhinavagupta, who came late in the line of Shaivite Gurus. The tradition began in the eighth or

ninth century and he appeared about the 11th century. Kshemaraja was a commentator, not one of the founding sages or great innovators.

The original Shaivite texts, such as the *Shiva Sutras* and *Spanda Karikas*, are strange and numinous. It is hard to wrap your mind around them. That is one reason why Kshemaraja's text is so helpful. His text is highly structured and logical, with a beginning, a middle and an end. It has a plot. By contrast, the *Shiva Sutras* and *Spanda Karikas* are hard to categorise. They are mysterious and wonderful, but the *Pratyabhijnahridayam* is more manageable. In Chapter 12, I will discuss the *Pratyabhijnahridayam* as a narrative. For now, let us look at its broad movements.

*Pratyabhijnahridayam* begins with God and the creation of the universe. The first sutra says:

*Chitih svatantra vishva-siddhi-hetuhu*

Supremely independent *Chiti*, universal Consciousness, is the cause of the universe.

The cause of the universe is Consciousness. Notice how different this is from the scientific view I have already mentioned. There Consciousness is a byproduct of the evolutionary process, not the fundamental cause. Here Consciousness is fundamental and matter evolves from it. My friend, Dr Gary Witus, a cognitive neuroscientist, tells me that science doesn't actually address the issue of Consciousness. He says that science is based on reductionism, and Consciousness is 'too big a question'. Science acknowledges that Consciousness is here, but avoids the question of what it is and where it came from. It is certainly true that Consciousness is a big question. I would say it is the biggest question for the obvious reason that all questions appear in Consciousness and nowhere else!

The second sutra says:

*Svecchaya svabhittau vishvam unmilayati*

Of Her own free will, *Chiti* unfolds the universe on Her own screen.

Consciousness creates the universe of Her own free will. No one made Her do it. She wanted to do it and She did it. *Chiti* unfolded the universe on Her own screen, which means on Herself. Western religions think of God as creating the universe over there. Shaivism says that there is no place outside of God where that can occur. There is no material other than God that He can use. He cannot say, 'I am God and I will go to a lumberyard and get some lumber. I am God and I will create a universe over there in New South Wales'. He cannot do that because there is no other 'there' besides

Himself. In the beginning there is only God. God has to create whatever He creates inside Himself. Thus the second sutra: Consciousness is free and Shiva unfolds the universe within Himself.

Notice by the way, I am saying Shiva: He; Chiti: She; and Consciousness: It. In the Absolute there is no gender distinction. It is She, He and It, both Shiva and Shakti, male and female. As we will see, the subjective side of supreme Consciousness is usually referred to as Shiva and the objective side as Shakti. In fact they are one. *Chiti* is sometimes considered the Goddess and is sometimes referred to as neutral Consciousness.

### I AM THE SUBJECT OF MY UNIVERSE

Shaivism homologises cosmic processes with personal ones. Consider the world you create while dreaming. You create a universe within yourself that seems objective. You feel that you are just one character in your dream and your world is filled with other people. When you wake up you discover there had been no one but you. It all took place within you. Shaivism says that one day we will awaken from the dream of our waking existence to discover the same thing. There is no one else here but me. All this, this whole universe, is the play of my awareness. And even though I see many, there is only one of us here.

Usually, we say that there are two sorts of things in our world, matter and Consciousness. Matter is inert and passive while Consciousness is active and can understand, analyse, think and feel. Matter is 'out there', Consciousness is 'in here'. But in a dream, what seems to be matter is revealed upon awakening to be Consciousness. In the waking state, science has shown that by splitting the atom, an enormous amount of energy is revealed to be latent in matter. Likewise, when our vision becomes subtle we discover that not only is energy latent in matter, but Consciousness is as well.

The *Upanishads* say: 'Wake up O man, wake up from the dream of separation'. Let us go one step further. Everything in your life that you know, you know through your own awareness. Every person, every fact, every thought, every fantasy, every fear, every event, every outside object, is always registered in your awareness. You cannot know anything outside of your awareness. Thus there is no universe outside of your own awareness. Wherever my awareness falls, those objects it perceives exist. Whatever my awareness does not perceive does not exist for me. If I try to imagine something outside my awareness, my awareness is imagining it.

A Shaivite sage said:

Nonexistence is contained in existence and is not other than it, given that there is no trace of anything outside of it.

The sage Kshemaraja says, 'In this world, nothing exists which is outside the range of Consciousness'. Consciousness is the supreme light by which everything else shines; it holds everything within itself.

In devotional yoga, the *bhakta's* attitude is that God is great and he is small. That is a perfectly legitimate attitude. But Shaivism's stance is much bolder, much more outlandish. It says that you are not the little *bhakta* who says, 'God is great, I am small'. You are Shiva Himself. Shaivism invites you to contemplate 'I am Shiva', here and now. (Let me add that, as we will see later, there is also space for the *bhakta's* attitude within Shaivism's large and compassionate borders.)

This room I am in exists for me because I am here. When I go to sleep at night my outer world ceases to exist. When I open my eyes the world exists again for me. When Shiva opens His eyes, the universe is created. When He closes His eyes it disappears. You will never have a universe beyond your own awareness. Thus, you are the aware subject of the universe you experience. You are Shiva.

#### AWARENESS IS THE HIGHEST GOOD

Awareness is much more than a luminous screen on which we record things. Everything that we want in life, whether it is success, money, love or health, is held in our awareness. The irony of the situation is that it is awareness itself that we seek. These external goals are each reducible to an inner world goal, an attribute of awareness. More fundamental than our desire for money, fame and relationship is the feeling that these things give us: the feeling of importance, of love, of security.

When a baby does not get the loving attention of its mother, it develops personality disorders. If a child were deprived of all human contact for an extended period, it would probably die. Human attention is love: an infant basks in it, a performer or an artist craves it. Human attention is the highest good. When it is brought to bear on any problem in the world, eventually it can solve it. And it is only human attention that can solve it. Human attention is what we seek from our loved ones. When we feel distraught we seek the comforting presence of a loving person.

Nisargadatta Maharaj says:

Do not undervalue attention. It means interest and also love. To know, to do, to discover, or to create you must give your heart to it—which means attention. All the blessings flow from it.

A few years ago, when they landed an unmanned spaceship on Mars, they sent a little camera on wheels running along the surface of the planet. The images it sent back were striking. I found myself riveted by them. Here was a terrain that no human eye had ever seen. It seemed lifeless and inert. In its coldness and stark quality, I felt sure that I could see this lack of human attention.

In India, they put a statue in a shrine and thousands of pilgrims come and worship it. In Pandarpur, in the state of Maharashtra, there is an image of Lord Vitthal in a temple that has been a place of pilgrimage for over a thousand years. That same image was glimpsed by Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Eknath. They wrote devotional poems to it hundreds of years ago.

When you see today the very same image that they looked at, you can feel the vibrations of all the love and human attention over the course of many years. That image, and many others that are similarly regarded, have come alive with Shakti. The secret lies simply in human attention.

For the same reason, famous landmarks and buildings, and places where significant events happened, have a special energy. This is why, also, famous people have an unmistakable charisma. They are not solitary individuals, like the rocks on Mars, but are a centre of many peoples' awareness.

In 1990, a friend invited me to attend one of the games of the World Championship chess match between Garry Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov. It was held in a theatre in midtown Manhattan. I had watched grandmasters play many times before, but this one was very different. The moves were being broadcast to thousands of people around the world on the Internet. Beyond them, they would be analysed by chess players in future magazines and books. The game was being played in chess history, which meant before unnumbered observers, many of them not yet born. I felt a different kind of resonance and depth of interest, which was a direct result, I thought, of the focus of all that human attention.

When, in meditation, we turn that blessed attention on ourselves, we nourish ourselves profoundly. In human attention there is love, luminous intelligence and energy. It has more vitamins than vitamins, more protein

than protein and more restorative power than the latest new remedy. Awareness itself is the most nourishing substance in creation. It is the Fountain of Youth that Ponce de Leon was searching for.

It is said that we are what we eat, but much more so, we are the thoughts and impressions that we entertain. The *Shiva Sutras* say, *Jnanam anam*: Knowledge is food. How we use and where we put our attention is decisive in defining the quality and profundity of our lives.

#### HEADLESS SHIVA: FIRST PERSONISM

Many years ago the English architect Douglas Harding was in India in the mountains. He looked across a vast expanse in the Himalayas. One moment he had the conventional understanding that his head was a small circle in a larger circle (that vast scene) which contained it. The next moment he had the experience that the scene he was looking at was actually inside his head. He had no head: awareness was a blazing entity that sat on his shoulders and contained everything he saw. For him on that day it was not a theory or an insight; but a direct experience. This experience changed him forever and he wrote his famous book, *On Having No Head*, which is a witty treatise whose essential point is that nothing we see, hear, feel or think is outside our awareness. Harding had performed the action of *anusandhana*, or unification of everything with the light of Consciousness. He had united the subject and the object or, perhaps more properly, had absorbed the object into the subject.

Contemplating a vast open space, as in the mountains, is a meditation technique known to the Shaivite sages. In this circumstance, thought-forms, *vikalpas*, end, and the mind opens to Consciousness. Jaideva Singh calls this *drishtibandhanabhavana*, or the 'visionary attitude in which all things are related'.

Based on Harding's insights, I wrote the following tale:

Once, Lord Shiva was between creations. He was considering manifesting a new universe and He called in His advisers to discuss the possibility. They were delighted, but they strongly objected to the fact that He was apparently absent from the last universe He had created.

'You must guarantee', they told Him, 'that You will not be so remote this time'.

'Don't worry', Shiva said. 'I recognise my mistake. This time I'll be obviously manifest. Wherever people are, I will be. And there will be an easy way to find me.'

'And what is that?'

'I will be manifest as a body without a head!'

This universe is the one He was creating. And He made good on His pledge. Look around you now. Actually follow Shiva's direction. Perhaps there are people nearby as you read this. Or perhaps you are alone. Notice that each body you see has a head—except one.



*Headlessness. The headless author sees his own head 'over there' in the mirror.*

The headless one is always me. This is everyone's experience. I can't say that the headless one is you, because to me you have a body and a head when I see you. But from your point of view, the headless one is you.

Other people have heads and bodies. One person, however, has only legs and a torso which culminate 'up here' in a space of blazing Consciousness. It is seen as a head in a mirror. But that is 'over there'. When experienced 'over here', it is not a head but the place of subjectivity, 'I am', the Self. This is, of course, a yogic joke. But like some jokes, it contains a profound understanding.

Harding took it as his life's work from that moment to express and share his experience. He developed a humorous technology of putting people in touch with their own subjectivity; 'I AM'. He called this the experience of the 'headless one' because when we know ourselves as subject, we are headless.

We have a head for ourselves only as object, in a mirror or a photograph. Living as object (third person) is the source of all our pain. We experience ourselves not as we are but as we think we are perceived by others. We allow ourselves to become objects 'over there', in others' eyes. The headless one is full and complete; the person as object is always vulnerable to the judgment of others.

This view of ourselves as object, Harding says, is learned behaviour. As infants we are headless. We are unselfconscious and uncontracted. To be headless means to be in the *avikalpa*, or thought-free state. As we learn to live in the mind we 'acquire a head'. The mind is a small head floating in a larger universe. Let the mind go and the universe is perceived as springing up from our shoulders. The room is in us, we are not in the room.

Learning to perceive ourselves as object is the real fall of man. It is the process of shrinking and diminution that Wordsworth laments in 'The Ode to Immortality':

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

By gradually absorbing a social awareness we establish ourselves in the third-person mode. We acquire a biography, a sense of personal dignity, a personality to develop, a reputation to defend. We enter the mundane drama of life. We become actors in the play, relatively indifferent to the performances of others but terribly attached to the outcomes of the one we call 'I'.

The headless one is different. He is supremely detached from those dramas. He knows himself to be the formless Consciousness that is the context of the play of life. He is not an actor in the play: he contains all the actors. He is aware that two arms, two legs and a trunk issue outward from this formless Consciousness, but he is not fooled into thinking he is a person.

*Spanda Karikas* I.14 says:

Two states are spoken about, the subject (the doer) and the object (the deed). Of these two, the object decays but the subject is imperishable.

The yogi thus must remember the subject, the headless one.

Washington Irving's story, 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow', always resonated powerfully for me. The main character is pursued by the image of a headless horseman, which is terrifying and final. He is a primal figure

evoking the myth of Yama, Lord of Death. But as in the *Katha Upanishad* where the terrible Yama becomes the Guru and gives instructions on the Self to young Nachiketa, so death is always the friend of the yogi. If there were no death there would be no yoga. Yoga conquers death by conquering that which is temporary. It lops off the head of the temporary personality and the finite mind. It puts us in touch with what is eternal and ever-present behind the endless succession of personalities and events. The headless horseman is not only the threat of death but also the threat of enlightenment. It is not only the cruel enemy trying to humiliate the personality but also the benevolent Guru trying to slaughter the ego. And beyond that it is the Self—for the headless one is me—and you.

Just as I am the 'I', so each of you is the 'I' too. There is only one 'I' in your universe and the way to find it is by looking inward. There is one subject, but many objects. When we look around from the point of view of the headless one, we feel certain that each of the other people is also the subject of his own universe. You are the Shiva of your own universe; you are the subject of your own universe.

I am intuitively sure that you others have interior worlds. My inner world is the major fact of my experience and no one but me is directly privy to it. I am the only one who is there. My thoughts and feelings are my own subjective reality. Notice that since I am the only one who lives inside it, I am the only one who is directly concerned with investigating and uplifting my inner world. That is why each of us has to take responsibility for our own spiritual growth.

#### MEDITATION I: HEADLESSNESS

If Douglas Harding had looked in the Shaivite text *Vijnanabhairava*, he would have found Dharana 62:

*Linam murdhni viyat sarvam bhairavatvena bhavayet  
Tat sarvam bhairavakaratejastattvam samavishet*

The yogi should contemplate the entire open space (or sky) under the form of the essence of Bhairava and as dissolved in his head. Then the entire universe will be absorbed in the light of Bhairava.

*Practice headlessness this way. Look at your Consciousness. Harding says that it is a luminosity on top of your shoulders that looks out and sees and records everything. He says that you only apparently have a head, what is really there is*

*this formless luminosity. You see your own head only in the mirror or in a photograph. From the point of view of awareness of the Self you are headless!*

*Look around you. Notice that the room and everything in it is recorded in your awareness. Try to see from Harding's or Shiva's perspective: everything is held in my awareness. Ultimately the only thing I see, hear, sense or feel is my own awareness. Let your head open up and accept everything you see within itself. I am Shiva, the Headless Being. There is no separation between me and my experience. It is all held in my awareness. Meditate this way for 10 minutes.*

**MEDITATION II: CONTEMPLATE YOUR OWN AWARENESS**

*With eyes closed, contemplate your own awareness. Contemplate that within your brilliant awareness there is boundless love and luminous intelligence. You hold your whole universe within your awareness, and awareness itself is the great healing power. Awareness is a deep ocean that contains all things. Meditate for 10 minutes.*