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Psychology of dream states and mental impressions in Mandukya Karika

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👁️ Jagrat: The Waking State

In Mandukya Karika, the waking state (Jagrat) is characterized by ‘outward-moving’ consciousness (Bahish-prajna). Here, the individual (Vaisvanara) perceives gross objects through the five senses.

Gaudapada argues that while this state feels uniquely ‘real,’ it is functionally similar to the dream state because both involve a subject-object duality. The waking state provides the ‘raw material’ or data for the mind’s later internal creations.

🌌 Taijasa: The Dream State

Taijasa is the ‘luminous’ state where consciousness is inward-moving (Antah-prajna). In this state, the mind is not perceiving external objects but is interacting with subtle objects created from the impressions (Vasanas) of the waking life.

Gaudapada’s radical psychological insight is ‘Vaithathya’ (the unreality of dreams). He posits that just as dream objects are found to be unreal upon waking, waking objects are similarly unreal from the perspective of the ultimate truth, as both are temporary modifications of the mind.

💾 Vasanas: Mental Impressions

Vasanas are the latent tendencies or psychological ‘scents’ left behind by previous experiences. They are the storage mechanism of the mind (Antahkarana).

In the psychology of the Mandukya Karika, these impressions are the ‘fuel’ for the dream state. Without Vasanas, the mind would have no content to project when the senses are withdrawn. They bridge the gap between waking actions and the internal narrative of the dream world.

🌑 Prajna: The Deep Sleep State

Susupti or Deep Sleep is a state of ‘unified consciousness’ (Ekibhuta), described as a ‘mass of cognition’ (Prajnana-ghana). There is no desire and no dream imagery.

Psychologically, this is the ‘causal’ state (Karana-sharira). It is the seed from which the waking and dream states emerge. While it is characterized by bliss (Ananda), it is distinct from enlightenment because it is enveloped in ‘Avidya’ (ignorance)—the potential for duality still exists, even if it is currently dormant.

Turiya: The Underlying Witness

Turiya is not a state like the other three, but the substratum of all of them. It is the ‘Atman’ or the pure consciousness that observes the transition between waking, dreaming, and sleeping without being affected by them.

In the psychology of Mandukya, Turiya is the ‘Amatra’ (the measureless). It is the realization that the ‘dreamer’ and the ‘waker’ are masks worn by a single, unchanging awareness. Realizing Turiya is the goal of the Mandukya Karika’s psychological discipline.