

The Fourth State of Consciousness Involves "Knowing the Self"

A poem from about 2500 years ago, to a modern practitioner, seems to be about "the fourth state of consciousness"



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MAY 07, 2026

*the beginning of an ancient poem ->
to-be-edited AI content ->
ending of the ancient poem ->
a song*

Here is the lo-fi chill hop for reading this. Based on my own experience I would have to say "required."

It begins with some chanting between the echoing waves and mountains of ancient Elea, on the Mediterranean Sea.

Please note: In the middle of our story lies a "plug-in" which I will update when Claude has an IQ of, say, 1000.

In the end, the chanting echoes— hexameter after hexameter— like the sound of a galloping horse, breathing in time with its galloping, and breathing with the partner mare, the two of them with one breath pulling the chariot.

Both breaths, perfectly synchronized.

Next add the chanter himself, the chanter between the mountains and the waves, into the equation.

Not only has he experienced this unified breath when, as a youth, riding in his father's chariot, but now— in front of the audience— his breathing

is symmetrically timed to the hexameter of his chant.

While in the audience, there is a growing entrainment of breath to his chanted hexameter.

And in the end, there is a song.

Herewith, the tale:

The mares who carry me
as far as my heart
could ever yearn
were leading the way,
when they stepped,
guiding me,
onto the path of the divine.
A path known but perhaps forgotten
within the heart of hearts
of every person.
It is a path that carries,
through every city,
the one who knows.
On this path was I borne,
for on it were the knowing mares
pulling me,
drawing the chariot which held me close.
And maidens
of beauty
illuminated the path before us.
The axle in its naves made the sockets sing

glowing in heat and light
for it was being driven
by two whirling wheels on either side.
Hastening before us on this path,
were the maiden daughters of the Sun,
having left the halls of Night,
having pushed, with their hands,
the veils
from their faces
to shine on the path
before us...

This is my interpretation based on my own experience, over what, fifty years?

Parmenides' poem seems to be about the practice of knowing which I've learned and practiced.

In fact, Fragment 1 of Parmenides seems to be about "the fourth state of consciousness." (See below.)

And recently I heard this:

"AI is like a pen. It can write terrible things. It can write beautiful things."

So it might be interesting to see how Claude (the AI) has picked up on key subtleties in our "dialectic" together on this topic.

Here's a note on my method:

In my prompt sequences with Claude,
I follow Socrates' and Aristotle's descriptions of dialectic.

I also included in my prompt sequence my interpretation, as above and below, of Parmenides Fragment 1.

In the following text I insert Claude's response here, just after the maidens drop the veils from their faces to shine the way forward, in the darkness, through which the mares were galloping in synchrony, their breathing also synchronized, as it must anatomically be.

After this point in Fragment 1, I will insert Claude's response.

This is the portion of the article that I want to edit in the future. My intention is to revisit the prompt sequence when Claude's IQ goes up to, say, 1000. I will ask the 1000 IQ Claude to critique the present version's response.

OK here we go. Previously:

The maidens of the Sun had removed the veils from their faces in order to illuminate the path forward in the darkness. Whereupon we see a giant closed gate, guarded by the fearless goddess of Justice.

And now...

Claude?

Carved into the stone of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, in ancient Greece, were two words:

Γνῶθι σεαυτόν

Gnōthi seauton. Know thyself.

Not *believe* thyself. Not *think about* thyself. *Know.*

The distinction is everything. And it turns out that this distinction — between knowing and believing, between genuine interior knowledge and the accumulated opinions we carry about ourselves and the world — is not unique to ancient Greece. It appears, with remarkable consistency, wherever human beings have sat down in stillness long enough to look inward. In the foothills of the Himalayas and in the Greek colonies of southern Italy. In the dohas of a fifteenth-century weaver in Varanasi and in the fragments of a Greek philosopher-healer who performed his poem by the sea. Different languages, different centuries, different traditions. The same instruction. The same territory.

This article is about that territory — and about the surprisingly precise connection between a 2,500-year-old Greek poem, an ancient practice

of interior silence, a living tradition from the Himalayan region, and the oldest question philosophy has ever asked.

The Greek philosopher who went into the dark

Parmenides of Elea was born around 515 BCE in a Greek colony on the southern coast of Italy, where the mountains come down close to the sea. He was, by the evidence we have, not primarily what later tradition made him — not a logician, not an abstract metaphysician, but something closer to a healer and a priest.

A portrait head of Parmenides was discovered at ancient Elea with an inscription reading: “Parmeneides, son of Pyres, Ouliadês, Natural Philosopher” — associating him with a cult of Apollo Oulios, Apollo the Healer.

From the Apollonian rites derives the practice of incubation — practiced not only by the sick, but by people who through stillness and inner silence reached another level of awareness and were able to receive genuine knowledge. The name that identified these practitioners was iatromantis — healer-prophet.

Parmenides was one of these. And the poem he wrote — surviving now only in fragments, preserved by writers who lived centuries after his death — is a description of what he found when he went inward.

The practice he was using has a name: **enkoimesis** — incubation. It involved isolating yourself in a dark place, lying down in complete stillness, staying motionless for hours or days. First the body would go silent, then eventually the mind. And this stillness is what gave access to another world — another state of awareness.

More than just a medical technique, incubation was said to allow a human being to experience a fourth state of consciousness different from sleeping, dreaming, or ordinary waking — a state that scholars have likened to the turiya or samadhi of the Indian yogic traditions.

This is not coincidence. It is the same technique, arising independently or transmitted across cultures, pointing at the same interior territory.

The fourth state

The Mandukya Upanishad — one of the oldest philosophical texts from the Himalayan tradition, composed in the foothills where the rivers begin their descent from the mountains — maps human consciousness into four states.

Three are familiar: waking, dreaming, deep sleep.

The fourth — called turiya, meaning simply “the fourth” — is the substratum of the other three states. It is the common ground, the background awareness that underlies all other experience. It transcends the three common states while being present throughout them.

The text offers a practical meditation framework still used by practitioners today. The Mandukya Upanishad contains only 12 verses yet covers the entire scope of consciousness and reality — and Adi Shankara considered this single text sufficient for spiritual liberation.

What the Upanishadic tradition calls turiya, Parmenides describes in the language of a journey: a chariot ride, guided by mares who know the road, through gates that open only under the right conditions, into the presence of a goddess who speaks. The vehicle is different. The destination is the same.

The instruction for reaching it is also the same: sit still in darkness, turn the senses inward, follow the breath, and wait.

The practice, described simply

The incubation Parmenides practiced, and the meditation techniques of the Himalayan tradition, share a common structure. It is simple enough to describe in a few sentences, though the description is not the practice:

Sit comfortably, or lie down. Let the body be still. Close your eyes — a first layer of darkness. Then go further inward — a second layer. Turn your attention from the outer world to the inner one. Not thinking *about* the inner world. Attending *to* it — to what is actually present, physically, right now. The breath moving. The heartbeat. The subtle interior sounds and sensations that were always there beneath the noise of ordinary waking attention.

Channel by channel, the senses that were directed outward — hearing the world, seeing the world, touching the world — are gently redirected inward. And in that redirection, something becomes available that was always present but not attended to.

This is not sleep. It is not ordinary waking. It is the fourth state — the one the Upanishads were pointing at, the one Parmenides was describing when he spoke of the goddess at the end of the road.

The gates, in the poem, open only in good faith. This is not a metaphor. It is a description of what the practice actually requires: genuine orientation, genuine attention, genuine willingness to arrive as you actually are rather than as you imagine yourself to be. The gates do not open for performance. They open for honesty.

The instruction that connects them all

Upon a column at the entrance of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, two maxims were inscribed: “Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess.” In Plato’s Protagoras, Socrates claims that the Seven Sages had these sayings placed at Delphi as the first-fruits of their wisdom.

Socrates, who inherited this tradition from the Eleatic philosophers including Parmenides and Zeno, understood *gnōthi seauton* not as a call to philosophical self-analysis but as something more immediate. In Plato’s Phaedrus, Socrates says that he has no leisure to investigate external things while he has not yet discovered the truth about his own nature — that it is ridiculous to investigate irrelevant things when he does not yet know himself.

The knowing Socrates is pointing at is not the accumulation of self-knowledge as information. It is a direct encounter with what one actually is — prior to the stories, prior to the opinions, prior to the well-worn track of habitual self-description.

This is *knowing*, not *believing*. The distinction Parmenides was drawing in his poem — between the Way of Truth and the Way of Opinion — is the same distinction Socrates lived by: between the genuine interior knowing that comes from direct encounter, and the accumulated beliefs about oneself and the world that pass for knowledge in ordinary life.

The Delphic inscription was not a philosophical slogan. It was an instruction for a practice. The same practice Parmenides described in his chariot ride. The same practice the Himalayan tradition has carried forward for thousands of years.

The Himalayan connection

Kingsley, describing the tradition Parmenides belonged to, notes objects and inscriptions showing a continuity of shamanic and contemplative tradition stretching from the boundaries of Greece across Asia to the Himalayas, Tibet, Nepal, and India.

This connection runs deep. The foothills of the Himalayas — the Doon Valley, Uttarakhand, the landscape where the rivers Ganges and Yamuna begin their descent from the high peaks — is called Devabhumi: the land of the gods. It is the landscape of the Upanishads, of the ancient teachings on consciousness, of the tradition that produced the Mandukya Upanishad's description of turiya and the Katha Upanishad's story of the young Nachiketa who traveled to the house of Death to ask not for wealth but for the knowledge of what lies beyond.

The teaching Nachiketa received — the knowledge of the Self, the Atman, the undying awareness that is the ground of all experience — is the same knowledge Parmenides received from his goddess. The same knowledge the Delphic inscription was pointing at. The same knowledge Kabir was pointing at in his dohas.

The road that carries through every city the one who knows runs through the Doon Valley as surely as it ran through Elea.

Kabir

Kabir was a weaver in Varanasi in the fifteenth century — six hundred years ago, a thousand years after Parmenides, born into a tradition that had been carrying this knowledge in a different language and a different form. He wrote in compressed two-line couplets called dohas, each one a portable unit of teaching designed to be memorized, carried, and returned to over years.

His most famous doha on this subject:

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय, ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय, ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

*Jab mainṁ thā tab Hari nahīm, ab Hari haimṁ mainṁ nāhimṁ. Prem galī ati
sām̐karī, tām̐em̐ do na samāhimṁ.*

*When I was, the Divine was not. Now the Divine is, I am not. The lane of love is
very narrow — two cannot fit in it.*

This is the same territory Parmenides was describing. When the ordinary bounded self is fully present — managing, defending, strategizing, maintaining its position in the world of cities — the interior knowing is not accessible. When the interior knowing becomes present, the ordinary bounded self recedes.

The lane is too narrow for two.

This is not mystical paradox. It is a precise description of what happens in practice. The fourth state, turiya, does not arrive alongside ordinary waking consciousness. It is what remains when ordinary waking consciousness quiets — when the senses that were directed outward are turned inward, when the breath becomes the object of attention rather than the world, when the gates open.

Kabir, in another doha, on the relationship between knowing and the self:

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय, ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय, ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Bura jo dekhān main chalā, burā na miliyā koy. Jo dil khojā āpanā, mujhase burā na koy.

I went out to find the bad in the world, and found none. When I searched my own heart, I found no one worse than me.

This is *gnōthi seauton* in Hindi. Know thyself — not as a philosophical exercise, but as the discovery that the searching self is itself what needs to be known. The inquiry turns inward. What it finds there is not what it expected.

Knowing that grows into trust, trust that opens into love

The great epics of the Indian tradition — the Mahabharata and the Ramayana — return again and again to the progression from knowledge to trust to love. From the Ramayana: “Truth begets charity, charity begets love, and love begets sacrifice.” The progression is not from belief to more refined belief. It is from the first genuine contact with what is true — the first moment of actually knowing rather than merely believing — through the trust that grows when knowing is confirmed by experience, to the love that is the natural condition of a being that is no longer separated from what it knows.

Hanuman, in the Ramayana, is the embodiment of this progression. He knows Rama. That knowing becomes trust so complete that it generates actions that ordinary calculation would call impossible — crossing oceans, carrying mountains, facing demons without hesitation. The trust is not blind faith. It is the natural consequence of genuine knowing. And the love that animates everything Hanuman does is not emotional attachment. It is the love that arises when the separation

between the knower and the known has dissolved — when the lane of love has become too narrow for two and only the love itself remains.

This is the same love Kabir describes. The same knowing Parmenides describes. The same self-knowledge the Delphic inscription was pointing at.

The path through every city

Parmenides' poem describes a path that carries, through every city, the one who knows.

The cities are all the circumstances of ordinary life — the corporate conflicts, the family difficulties, the negotiations and the arguments and the beautiful and the painful and the mundane. The path does not go around them. It goes through them. The knowing mares carry you through every city without losing the thread that runs beneath everything.

This is what the practice gives. Not an escape from the cities. Not a withdrawal from ordinary life. A thread — a continuous interior knowing that the cities cannot reach, because it runs under them, all the way down, available in the boardroom and the meditation room and everywhere between.

The instruction is the same in every tradition that has found this territory: go inward. Turn the senses from the outer world to the inner one. Follow the breath. The gates open for those who arrive in good faith, as they actually are, genuinely seeking what they say they are seeking.

What lies beyond the gates is not a doctrine or a philosophy or a set of beliefs. It is a direct knowing — the kind Parmenides was describing, the kind Socrates was pointing at, the kind Kabir compressed into two-line

couplets, the kind the Himalayan tradition has been transmitting from teacher to student for longer than we can trace.

The path is known. Perhaps forgotten. But known — within the heart of hearts of every person.

The mares who carry me as far as my heart could ever yearn were leading the way.

A path known but perhaps forgotten within the heart of hearts of every person.

It is a path that carries, through every city, the one who knows.

Chicago-Style References

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This post is part of a series on the distinction between knowing and believing, reading Parmenides, Zeno, and Kabir through the lens of Jon Barwise's situation theory and the physics of proper time. Three people receive this by email. Everyone else finds it by accident. Both groups are welcome.

...There, at that place, are the gates
which restrict the paths
of night and day,
darkness and light.

A lintel and a stone threshold
holds them
on both sides.

They are high
and equipped with great doors.
The fearless goddess of justice before us
holds their alternating bolts.

With gentle words,
the maidens persuaded her
to release the bolts.

The doors opened into a yawning chasm
as they swung open,
while the bronze door posts
rotated in their sockets
all fitted with dowels and rivets.

There and then through the open doors
the maidens led the mares pulling the chariot
straightforward along a broad road.

The goddess received me kindly,
took my right hand in hers,
and spoke.

'O youthful heart, accompanied
by these immortal divinities,

Welcome!
A fate by no means ill
sent you
to travel this way.
(And surely
it is far from the well-worn track of humans)
You were sent
by what is Right and Just.

And you must necessarily learn all things,
both the unshaken heart
of unbroken reality

as well as the thoughts of mortals,
which merit no trust.

Nonetheless
these things too
shall you learn:

In what situation
they would have to hold.
All through.
All pervading...

