

# Sthūlasr̥ṣṭi – Part I



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## Introduction

We have covered the topics of *kāraṇa* and *sūkṣma sr̥ṣṭi* quite elaborately<sup>1</sup>. We now enter into the *sthūla-sr̥ṣṭi*, which is the creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*) of the gross world (*sthūla*). The gross world, which is perceived by our senses is created from the *tamas* aspect of the five *tanmātras* which are space (*ākāśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*agni*), water (*āpaḥ*) and earth (*pṛthivī*). But why does *Vedānta* emphasise that the gross world has to be born from the *tamas* aspect? This is because the gross world that we perceive is inert (*jaḍa*) and since inertness is indicative of *tamas*, the gross world is inferred as created from the *tamas* aspect of the *tanmātras*<sup>2</sup>.

The gross world cannot be directly created from the *tanmātras* for they are subtle in nature. If the subtle world can only be created from the subtle, the gross world too has to be created only from the gross elements. The *tamasic* aspect of the *sūkṣma tanmātras* (subtle elements) undergoes the process of *pañcīkaraṇa* by which they become *sthūla-bhūtas* or gross elements. It is these *sthūla-bhūtas* that combine with each other to produce the gross world that we perceive.

## Tanmātras and Sthūlabhūtas

When the five elements — space (*ākāśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*agni*), water (*āpaḥ*) and earth (*pṛthivī*) — exist in their pure natural states they are called *tanmātras* — *tad mātram* (that alone). But during the process of *pañcīkaraṇa* they lose their pure natural states by mutually combining and thus coming to possess aspects of the other

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the essays from July 2003 to February 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The *sattva* aspect of the *tanmātras* produces the *jñānendriyas* and *anataḥkaraṇa* and the *rajas* aspect of the *tanmātras* produces the *karmendriyas* and *pañcaprāṇas*. This is just to recapitulate the ideas already dealt with in the previous essays.

elements also. To explain — the *tanmātra ākaśa* (space) contains only space but after *pañcīkaraṇa*, the *sthūla-ākaśa* will not only have space but the other four elements also, i.e., air, fire, water and earth. So too *sthūla-vāyu* (gross air), *sthūla-agni* (gross fire), *sthūla-āpaḥ* (gross water) and *sthūla-pṛthivī* (gross earth) will all have aspects of the other elements.

As *tanmātras*, space (*ākaśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*agni*), water (*āpaḥ*) and earth (*pṛthivī*) are all subtle, unavailable for sensory perception, but after *pañcīkaraṇa* they become gross and are available for sensory perception. *Yad indriyaiḥ upalabhyate tat sthūlam* – that which is perceived by the senses is gross<sup>3</sup>.

Before *pañcīkaraṇa* the five elements are called *apañcīkṛta-pañca-bhūta* (the five elements which have not undergone *pañcīkaraṇa*) and after *pañcīkaraṇa* they are called *pañcīkṛta-pañca-mahā-bhūta* (the five great elements which have undergone *pañcīkaraṇa*). It is to be noted that in *Vedantic* terminology the term *pañca-bhūtas* normally refers to the *tanmātras* that have not undergone the process of *pañcīkaraṇa* and the term *pañca-mahā-bhūta* normally refers to the *tanmātras* after they have undergone the process of *pañcīkaraṇa*.

It is *pañcīkaraṇa* which transforms the whole scenario of creation by changing the subtle into gross. Thus *pañcīkaraṇa* is an important stage in the evolution of matter. One can very well broadly divide creation into 'before *pañcīkaraṇa*' and 'after *pañcīkaraṇa*'.

## ***Pañcīkaraṇa***

The word '*pañcī-karaṇa*' literally means 'creating (*karaṇa*) fives (*pañcī*)'. It is a process of five-fold division and mutual combination by which the five *pañca-mahā-bhūtas* are created. This has been elaborately described in many *prakaraṇa-granthis* (introductory texts). It is fascinating to see Sri Swami Vidyananda giving

<sup>3</sup> The only exception being *sthūla ākaśa* which because of its inherent predominant space aspect remains unperceived by the senses. In *Vedānta* space and time are *sākṣī bhāṣya* i.e. they are revealed by the witness self and are not perceived by the senses (*pratyakṣa*) or inferred (*anumāna*) by the mind. *Sthūla vāyu*, though not perceived by the eye, is perceived by the *tvak* (skin).

a one verse summary of this *pañcīkaraṇa* process in *Pañcadaśī* (1.27).

द्विधा विधाय चैकैकं चतुर्धा प्रथमं पुनः ।  
स्वस्वेतरद्वितीयाशैर्योजनात्पञ्च पञ्चते ॥

*Dvidhā vidhāya caikaikam caturdhā prathamam punaḥ,  
Svasvetaradvitīyāśairyojanātpañca pañcate.*

By dividing each *tanmātra* into two equal parts and subdividing the first half of each element into four equal parts, and then adding to the other half of each element one sub-division of each of the remaining four, each element becomes five in one.

The above verse may be very terse to understand. Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda has developed a graphic diagram to explain the *pañcīkaraṇa*. Refer to the diagram below as you go through the stages mentioned in the next page:

### The Process of Five-Fold Self-Division and Mutual Combination PANCHEEKARANA

Stages	Space 1	Air 2	Fire 3	Water 4	Earth 5	Description
(i)						Tanmatras; each in itself
(ii)						Tendency to divide into two equal parts.
(iii)						The split complete.
(iv)						One half remaining intact, the others split into 4.
(v)						Each half married with 4-bits borrowed from all the others.

Sky = 1/2 S + 1/8 A + 1/8 F + 1/8 W + 1/8 E.  
Air = 1/2 A + 1/8 S + 1/8 F + 1/8 W + 1/8 E.  
Fire = 1/2 F + 1/8 S + 1/8 A + 1/8 W + 1/8 E.  
Water = 1/2 W + 1/8 S + 1/8 A + 1/8 F + 1/8 E.  
Earth = 1/2 E + 1/8 S + 1/8 A + 1/8 F + 1/8 W.

- Stage (i) : *Tanmātras* remain in their own individual pure state.
- Stage (ii) : Each *tanmātra* of all the five elements shows a tendency to split into two equal halves.
- Stage (iii) : They split into two halves.
- Stage (iv) : At this stage half-*tanmātra* of each element remains intact and the other half divides itself into four equal bits – each bit would be one eighth of the whole *tanmātra*. Thus at this stage each *tanmātra* has split into five segments:  
 a) one-half bit and b) four one-eighth bits.
- Stage (v) : In this last stage, each half remains the same and it combines with the four one-eighth bits borrowed from all the other four elements.<sup>4</sup>

## The Individual Designation

After the completion of the *pañcīkaraṇa*, if every *sthūlabhūta* (gross element) has aspects of other elements, why at all call them by individual names? In other words, if *ākāśa* has aspects of *vāyu*, *agni*, *āpah* and *pṛthivī*, then why call it *ākāśa*? The answer is provided by Sri Veda Vyasa in the *Brahma Sūtra* (II.iv.22)—“*vaiśeṣyāttu tadvādastadvādaḥ*—but owing to the preponderance (of any one), occurs the corresponding designation”. Thus even though all the five elements are included in each element, there is a preponderance of a particular element in each one of the *sthūlabhūtas* (gross elements). Depending upon the preponderance the designation is given. Thus in *ākāśa* even though there are aspects of the other four elements *vāyu*, *agni*, *āpah* and *pṛthivī* they are all only one-eighth while *ākāśa* per se is one-half. That becomes the reason for that particular element to be designated as *ākāśa*. This applies to the other *sthūlabhūtas* also.

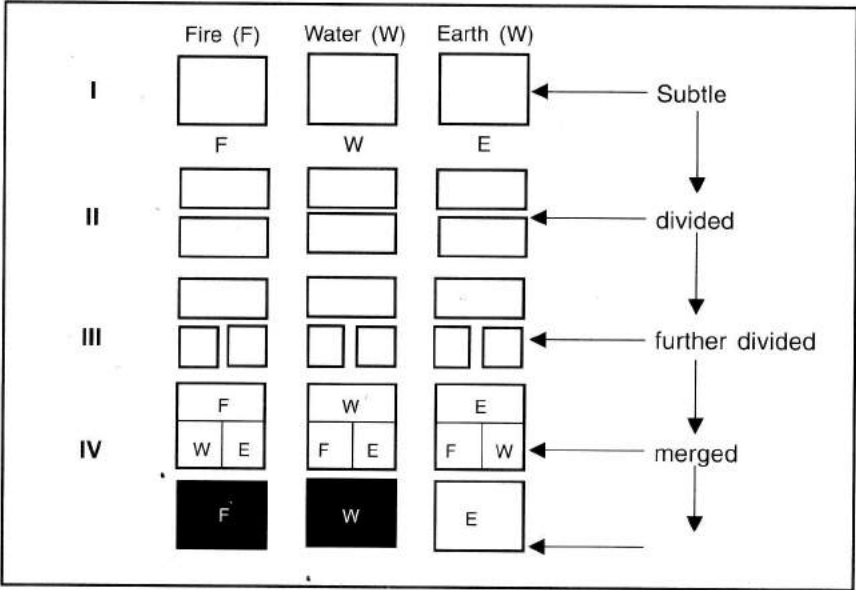
## The *Pramāṇa* for *Pañcīkaraṇa*

None of the *Upaniṣads* has even mentioned *pañcīkaraṇa*. And

<sup>4</sup> The explanation and chart are taken from Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji's commentary on Sri Sankara's *Atma-bodha*, Verse 12, CCMT Publications.

hence there is a grave misgiving whether the concept of *pañcīkaraṇa* is just a speculation which does not derive its authority from the *Vedas*. This objection will not stand valid for a student of *Vedānta* who has grasped the overall picture provided by the *Upaniṣhads*. The concept of *pañcīkaraṇa* has evolved from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad* which speaks of the *trivṛtkaraṇa* (triplication) and the *Taittirīya Upaniṣhad* and others which make clear mention of elements being five. To understand this we need to see in a little more detail what the *trivṛtkaraṇa* is.

The *tanmātras* mentioned in *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad*, chapter VI, are only three: *agni* (fire), *āpah* (water) and *pṛthivī* (earth). There is no mention of the other two *tanmātras* – *ākāśa* and *vāyu*, in this chapter dealing with creation. With these three elements the *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad* (VI.iii.3,4) propounds the *trivṛtkaraṇa* (triplication) process. The three *tanmātras* (stage I) – *agni* (fire), *āpah* (water) and *pṛthivī* (earth) – are first divided into two parts (stage II). One half is retained intact while the other half is divided into two parts (stage III). One-fourth part of each element is united with the half of the other two elements (stage IV). In this



way, by combination with the other elements the *tanmātras* become *sthūlabhūtas* (stage V)<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, many *Upaniṣhads*, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣhad* (II.1) for example, speak of all the five *tanmātras* but do not mention any process of division and combination among the elements. *Vedānta acharyas* have combined both these and evolved the *pañcīkaraṇa*. From the *Taittirīya Upaniṣhad* and other *Upaniṣhads* which speak of the five elements, they have arrived at the number of elements being five and from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad* they have discovered the principle of division and mutual combination. The *trivṛtkaraṇa* when applied at the level of the five elements naturally becomes *pañcīkaraṇa* and hence there is no question of *pañcīkaraṇa* not having a *vedic* basis. Thus the objection that *pañcīkaraṇa* is *aprāmāṇya* (not based on the *Vedas*) does not hold the scrutiny of reason. Sri Swami Sadananda in *Vedānta Sāra* clarifies this succinctly:

अस्य अप्रामाण्यं न आशङ्कनीयं त्रिवृत्करणश्रुतेः पञ्चीकरणस्य अपि उपलक्षणत्वात् ॥

*Asya aprāmāṇyam na āśaṅkanīyam trivṛtkaraṇaśruteḥ pañcīkaraṇasya api upalakṣaṇatvāt.*

The authoritativeness of this method of compounding should not be questioned, for the triple combination described in the *Sruti* indirectly refers to this *pañcīkaraṇa*<sup>6</sup>.

## Conclusion

These *sthūlabhūtas* (gross elements) that have been created from the process of *pañcīkaraṇa* create the four types of *sthūla śarīras* (gross-bodies) and the fourteen *lokas* which form the *sthūla-prapañca* (gross-world). This shall be the topic for the next essay.

<sup>5</sup> This pictorial representation has been taken from 'Tat Tvam Asi – notes on *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad*' by Swamini Vimalananda, CCMT Publications.

<sup>6</sup> One may still have some doubts lingering – why does not the *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad* mention the two elements *ākāśa* and *vāyu* and why does the *Taittirīya Upaniṣhad* not speak about the five-fold division and mutual combination? These do not form the main topic of our discussion and hence to avoid digression, these topics are not discussed here.