

Mandukya Upanishad:
An inquiry into what is Real And Unreal
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Bracelet is an illusory appearance of gold; only when the gold is forgotten does one see a bracelet. Even so, are the illusory notions of a nation or the world and also that of repeated births. When the false notion of the bracelet is rejected, the truth of the gold is revealed; and when the false notion of the subject-object is rejected, there is no ignorance to create a division. Thought alone creates all these divisions and illusions. When it ceases, creation ceases too, then you realize that all the waves constitute one ocean, dolls are wood, pots are clay and the three worlds are absolute Brahman. – Yoga Vasishtha.

PREAMBLE

The statement “*Brahma Satyam jagat mithya* – Brahman is the only reality and all the others are *mithya* or illusory, an unending dream” puts in a nutshell the entire non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Sankara and his teacher’s teacher Gaudapada. But any person even with a minimum intelligence is bound to argue how this everlasting universe perceived by him and others like him day in and day out in the waking state be a dream? The response to this question is very meticulously investigated and expounded in the great MANDUKYA UPANISHAD and its explanatory or auxiliary treatise *Mandukya Karika* by Acharya Gaudapada. It may be noted that Gaudapada’s Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad is the first systematic exposition of Advaita Vedanta which has come down to us from Pre-Sankara days. Bhagavan Adi Sankara was so fascinated by the theme of this Upanishad that he commented upon both the Upanishad and the Karika. The Mandukya Upanishad mantras provide us with the staple food for our intellect by enunciating the Truth while the Karika graphically reveals to us a line of enquiry and thinking with logic and reason to find out that Truth.

Let the universe be real or a dream, in what way we are concerned? Of what use is this intellectual exercise to us who are already overburdened with the problems and challenges of daily living? Is it not a sheer waste of time to indulge in this cerebral gymnastics? All the replies to these and other similar issues can be found in this Upanishad itself. By thinking over these problems and analyzing them with the instruments provided in the Upanishad and the Karika we can certainly come to the conclusion that this world and worldly objects are all momentary and not real and such momentary worldly objects cannot give us eternal Bliss and that Eternal Bliss lies only in realizing Brahman. Mandukya Upanishad and the Karika take us to that Bliss through a direct path as an arrow flies to hit the target.

The Karika of the Upanishad has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter called *Agama Prakarana* has been dedicated to the ‘Unity of Consciousness’ that is present in

the three states of human being that is waking, dream and deep sleep and also deals with the fourth state called ‘Turiya’, the transcendent state of illumination.

The second chapter called *Vaithathya Prakarana* talks about the exposition of Unreality of the World-of-Duality or Illusion. In this chapter it has been further explained that waking experiences are similar to dream experiences. In both the states objects experienced are external to the experiencer and it asserts that there is no birth, no death, no bondage and no release of the Atman.

According to the third chapter of the Mandukya Upanishad called *Advaita Prakarana* (Non-dualism) The One manifests Himself as many without undergoing any real changes. It states that every change is imaginary and to a man who has realized the Absolute Truth all things are equivalent to nothing and only the Atman is of prime importance.

The fourth chapter of this Upanishad entitled *Alata Shanti Prakarana* (Quenching the Firebrand) talks about the theory of non-creation. It has rejected the concept of God as the Creator. It has claimed that God has projected Himself into the World and the world of duality is nothing but mere imagination, an Illusion. According to this section of the Upanishad once the Truth has been realized nothing else seems real and there remains neither bondage nor attachment. Only Eternal Bliss prevails.

Mandukya Upanishad forms a part of the Atharva Veda. Though this is the shortest of the Upanishads, consisting of only twelve mantras in prose, it occupies a very important position in the Vedantik literature. This is because the Upanishad consists of the essence of the entire Advaita Vedanta. In fact one of the Mahavakyas used for deep meditation (*ayam atma brahma - this Atman is Brahman*) has been derived from the Mandukya Upanishad. Hence it is no wonder when the Muktika Upanishad observes “Mandukya alone is sufficient for an aspirant to reach liberation” (*mandukyam ekam kevalam mumukshunam vimuktaye*). According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan it contains the fundamental approach to reality.

There are several theories about the nomenclature of this Upanishad but it is generally attributed to a sage called Manduka.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED IN THE UPANISHAD

Like all the other Upanishads the Mandukya Upanishad also consists of a teacher and a taught because no Upanishadic study is complete without the presence of a Guru. As a result, the Upanishad has explained all its contents through the words of the Guru. It is with the help of the Mandukya Upanishad that individuals learn to dissect their lives completely and in turn discover the Ultimate Truth.

The Upanishad has the uniqueness to declare the uncut, raw Truth without any kind of polish or decoration and embellishment which may cause the human minds and intellects to revolt against the very concept and its implications. The Mandukya Upanishad hears

all such intellectual and mental follies and cautions that the declarations of the Upanishad contain nothing but truth uncolored by sweet add-ons.

Most of the Upanishads have some stories or the other to convey their message; but the Mandukya Upanishad delivers its message through a symbol. This symbol is AUM. Just as a *shaligrama* stone is worshipped as Bhagavan Vishnu or Narayana wherein the worshipper knows that the object of his worship is not a stone but God himself, AUM is considered an apt symbol of Brahman. The Upanishad declares that AUM and Brahman are one and the same. They support the phenomenal world – AUM supporting the phenomenal world represented by sounds and Brahman supporting the phenomenal world represented by the varieties of sense experiences.

When the phenomenal world is negated by knowledge, there is only the substratum left – that is AUM or Brahman. It is like the ghost being negated leaving behind only the post. But how to meditate on AUM?

First in our waking state we meditate that we are Virat that is Brahman as the sum total of all physical bodies. This is represented by the letter ‘A’. Next we imagine that we are in dream state when we consider that we are Hiranyagarbha that is the Brahman as the sum total of all the minds which is ‘U’ of AUM. Then we imagine that we are in deep sleep when we take us to be one with Isvara which is the Brahman associated with its power ‘Maya’. This is represented by M of AUM. These three stages are considered as ignorance. If we are able to go still further, beyond everything, then we become one with *Turiya*, Pure Consciousness. We are then *amatra* in the syllable AUM, beyond duality. We are Brahman. This is how the Upanishad explains Brahman through the symbol of AUM.

SHANTI MANTRA – PEACE INVOCATION

We are attempting to study the Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika in as much details as we are gifted to understand. So, as is customary, we begin to pray that we may have healthy bodies and minds. We pray that our bodies and minds may be steady and not create any problems for us. We pray that we can hear good things and see good things so that there are no distractions and that we can devote ourselves entirely to the subject, living a life as long as the gods decree. This prayer is as follows.

*Om! Bhadram karnebhih s’rnuyāma devāh
bhadram pasyemāk□habhiryajatrāh
sthirairangaistustuvamsastanūbhi
rvaśema devahitam yadāyuh
svasti na indro vriddhaśravāh
svasti nah pū□hā viśvavedāh
svasti nastārk□hyo ari□htanemih
svasti no brihaspatirdadhātu
Om śāntih; śāntih; śāntih ||*

“Om. Shining Ones! May we hear through our ears what is auspicious; Ye, fit to be worshipped! May we see with our eyes what is auspicious; May we, endowed with body strong with limbs, offering praise, complete the full span of life bestowed upon us by the divine beings; May Indra, of enhanced fame, be auspicious unto us; May Pūshan, who is all-knowing, be auspicious unto us; May Tārksya, who is the destroyer of all evils, be auspicious unto us; May Brihaspati bestow upon us auspiciousness!

Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

Object of this treatise: “As a man stricken with disease regains his normal state with the removal of the cause of the disease, so the self, laboring under misapprehension, owing to identification of itself with misery, recovers its normal state with the cessation of the illusion of duality, which manifests itself as the phenomenal universe. This realization of non-duality is the end to be attained”. – *Adi Sankara*

In the first essay of this series we had an aerial view of the Mandukya Upanishad and the Karika of Acharya Gaudapada. With the grace of The Lord, let us commence their detailed study. This Upanishad has 12 mantras (with no sub-division) and the Karika has 215 verses divided into four convenient chapters (*prakaranas*) as stated earlier.

AGAMA PRAKARANA

The twelve mantras of the Mandukya Upanishad come under Agama Prakarana with Karika verses interspersed at convenient places for clarification. As the Sanskrit mantras of the Upanishad make a delightful lyrical reading they are reproduced in this essay (in a transliterated form with all its shortcomings) for the benefit of those who are inclined to snatch a look into the original source of light. It may be of interest to note that this entire Upanishad has been rendered into a soulful musical treat by the famous Hindustani Classical Music Vocalist Pandit Jasraj ji which is pleasing to the ears and soothing to the heart. In this dissertation the Upanishadic mantras and the Karika verses of the Acharya have been referred to distinctly. According to the scholars the mere Upanishad portion without Karika does not present a full view of the philosophy and hence a study of both is advocated.

This chapter explains the real nature of Atman and focuses on elucidating the meaning of AUM.

MANTRA – 1

Harih Om. om ity etad aksharam idam sarvam, tasyopavyakhyanam bhutam bhavad.h bhavishyad iti sarvam onkara eva, yach chanyat.h trikalatitam tad apy onkara eva .. 1..

Harih om. AUM, the syllable (word), is all this. To be clearer, all that it is past, present, and future is verily AUM. That which is beyond the three periods of time is also truly AUM.

The Mandukya Upanishad starts with the above mentioned declaration which is sudden and straight just as the firing of a bullet. There are no stories, no descriptions, no poetical ramblings, and not even any mention about a teacher and the taught. It is just a big-bang. Despite this, we can visualize a master expounding the revolutionary ideas to an equally devoted, inquisitive student in sylvan ambience because *Guru-Sishya parampara* is the fundamental creed of our ancient educational system.

We can also presume that the following question would have been posed by the sincere student to the learned teacher to kindle him to expound the great doctrine about Reality. The query could be “Is there not a better purpose of life than eating, drinking, breeding, growing and dying? Is life a mere journey from the womb to the tomb through the road full of the pot-holes of sorrows and smiles, hopes and disappointments, pleasure and pain, love and hate etc.,? Is there no way possible to come out of this swamp and quandary? Can there be at all a destination of unbroken peace and joy?” It is to that intelligent student the Master addresses this famous Upanishadic teaching.

In this first mantra the idea put forward is that understanding the meaning of AUM helps the realization of the essential nature of Atman. This is because all the *srutis* say so and hence it is the final dictum.

AUM can be looked at three angles viz., 1.as a sound 2.as a symbol and 3.as a word or syllable. For the present the teacher says the word or the name AUM is all this, meaning thereby, that all the plurality and pairs of opposites recognized by us in the outer world is the word AUM which is a Divine Factor, an Over-riding Principle, and a Spiritual Common Denominator. Just as different varieties of mud-pots are in a sense nothing but mud, just as all diversified objects that we see around us indicated by various names are not different from their corresponding names, so too there is a Divine Eternal Factor behind the pluralistic world and therefore all this is verily AUM and not different from it.

The pots have come out of mud, sustained by mud and go back to mud when they are destroyed. Similarly, the visual world phenomena come out of the Divine Truth, exist in that Truth, and return to that Truth when they are withdrawn from their manifestation. That fundamental Truth, the Eternal, All-pervading principle of Consciousness is indicated here as AUM.

To clarify the issue involved, the Master explains that “all that is past, present and future is, indeed, AUM meaning thereby that the entire world of objects cognized by the humans in the past, being cognized in the present, and that may be cognized in the future has one substratum which is unchanging in all three periods of time and that factor is represented by the symbol, the sound and the word AUM. It is further elucidated that if anything can be conceived to exist beyond these three periods of time, that is also AUM.

Thus AUM represents not only the manifested world of plurality (the matter) but also its substratum, the unmanifest, non-dual Reality, the spirit behind the matter.

MANTRA – 2

sarvam hy etad.h brahma, ayam atma brahma so.ayam atma chatushpat.h..
2..

All this is verily Brahman. This Atman is Brahman. This Atman has four quarters (parts).

This mantra contains three statements as under:

1. All this is verily Brahman.
2. This Atman is Brahman.
3. This Atman has four quarters or *padas*.

We shall now examine them.

In the previous mantra it was stated that ‘all this is AUM’. Now the sage says that all this is Brahman. It naturally connotes that AUM is Brahman. He also says that this Atman is Brahman. It signifies that the notion we might have entertained that Atman is different from Brahman is not valid and that in the final analysis Atman is Brahman only. We have therefore, to be clear *ab initio* as to what Atman is and what Brahman is.

The idea of Atman and Brahman can be illustrated by the familiar example of the limited room space and the unlimited total space. The atmospheric space is not limited in any manner. But yet we feel that the space inside the four walls of a room is limited. What brought this situation? The space in the room identifying itself with walls assumes to itself a special ego or status as the room space. The so called room space was the same as the total space before the walls were constructed and if the walls were to be demolished the former room space will go back to the total space or will be identified with the total space. Therefore, the room space is nothing other than the total space and both are one and the same.

Similarly, the All-pervading Reality, Brahman, in its identification with the body, mind and intellect, feels for itself a separate personality in its own delusion or Maya. Once this delusion takes place it acquires the ideas of its own mortality, egoism, vanity and the consequent tribulations. Atman is that Reality, which though undivided and indivisible, eternal, has come to manifest itself within the locus of the body. That undivided Reality is Brahman, the All-pervading, Absolute and Unborn as in the case of the total space mentioned in the above example. Hence the mantra 2 of the Mandukya Upanished declares “this Atman is Brahman” (*ayam atma brahma*).

In this declaration the word ‘this’ is very significant and volumes have been written explaining its concept. For our purpose we may understand it as follows. Suppose, from the place where I am sitting (Point ‘A’), there is a table at five feet distance (Point ‘B’) and a chair at two feet distance (Point ‘C’). So for me Point ‘B’ is ‘that’ and Point ‘C’ is

‘this’. Suppose, a book is placed between me and the chair say at a distance of one foot from me at Point ‘D’, then Point ‘D’ becomes ‘this’ and the point ‘C’ also becomes ‘that’. In this way if we continue to eliminate all the points coming under the category of ‘that’, we reach the very last point, at which all objects indicated by ‘that’ are gone and only the final ‘this’ remains with reference to which there cannot be anything nearer to me. That last point is our Self, the ‘Atman’ which is referred in this mantra as ‘this Atman’. We may call this as ‘The Absolute This’, an All-pervading spiritual factor. The Upanishad says that **this Atman is Brahman**.

This oft-quoted declaration is considered to be a major statement – *maha vakya* - by Vedantic seekers. A Maha Vakya is a Scriptural Declaration which has got inexhaustible connotations which reveal themselves the more and more a seeker reflects on it. The Upanishad follows the technique of explaining an unknown proposition by means of known logical analysis. Just as by looking at the smoke rising at a distance it can be inferred that there must be a fire behind it at that distant place, so too when the insentient or inert body participates in life’s activities it can be conveniently presumed that there is some spark of life (Consciousness) which energizes that body and provokes it to act; when such a spark is absent we take it that it is a dead body.

Similarly the Rishi of the Upanishad attempts to throw light on the concepts of Brahman or the Atman through its manifestations. He says that this Atman has four quarters or *padas* or limbs. Here limbs do not mean that Brahman has four parts or divisions like four legs to an animal. What the Upanishad means to say is that the same Atman seems to possess four attributes or four aspects viz., the waking, the dream, the deep-sleep and *Turiya* planes of consciousness, although the first three aspects devolve into the fourth one in actuality just as all the smaller denomination weighing stones like 250 gms, 500 gms, 750 gms lose their individual identity when they are considered as the limbs or members of a Kilogram. When the three states of waking, dream and deep-sleep merge in the order of the previous one in the succeeding one the knowledge of the fourth one, the *Turiya* state of Consciousness, is attained. In that state, the parts have become One Whole (Atman) and there is no waker or dreamer or deep-sleeper. This is the idea of the Rishi when he says the Atman has four quarters. What they are, what is their behavioral pattern, what are their fields of activity etc., will be taken up next.

We have so far discussed about the attempts of the Rishi of the Upanishad to throw light on the concepts of Brahman or the Atman through its manifestations. He said that “*All this is verily Brahman. This Atman is Brahman. This Atman has four quarters (parts).*” We have to be clear that when it is stated that this Atman has four quarters or *padas* or limbs it does not mean that Brahman has four parts or divisions like four legs to an animal. What the Upanishad means to say is that the same Atman seems to possess four attributes or four aspects viz., the waking, the dream, the deep-sleep and *Turiya* planes of consciousness, although the first three aspects devolve into the fourth one in actuality. This is the underlying idea of the Rishi when he says that the Atman has four quarters. What they are, what is their behavioral pattern, what are their fields of activity, how the four quarters are said to indicate Atman etc., is explained now.

WAKING STATE

MANTRA – 3

jagarita sthano bahishprajnah saptanga ekonavimshati mukhah sthula bhug vaishvanarah prathamah padah .. 3...

The first quarter (*Pada*) is *Vaisvanara* whose sphere of activity is the waking state, who is conscious of the external world of objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and whose experience consists of gross material objects of the world.

Human life is nothing but a series of experiences wherein three features play a dynamic role. They are 1. the experiencer 2. the experienced and 3. the experiencing i.e. the relationship between the experiencer and the experienced. When we juxtapose these experiences into our own inner being or consciousness, we find that there are three planes of consciousness or three facets of life in the forms of the waker, the dreamer and the deep-sleeper in us. The experiences we undergo in these three states are entirely different from one another. The Mandukya Upanishad explains the exact location, identity, field of activity and things enjoyed by us in these three states. It takes up first the waking state (*jagarita sthana*).

The waker-ego is called *Vaisvanara* or *Visva* that enjoys the waking state consciousness wherein it is aware of the world of sense-objects. According to Sankara he (the waking state) is called *Vaisvanara* because he leads all creatures of the universe in diverse ways to the enjoyment of various sense objects. or because he comprises all beings. The waker is not only aware of the objects of senses but also enjoys them in the nature of *shabda, sparsha, roopa, rasa, gandha* – sound, touch, shape or forms, taste and smell through his respective sense organs. The Upanishad puts the idea as 1. the waker – ego’s sphere of activity is the waking state, and 2. who is conscious of the external world of objects.

The important word of the mantra here is ‘*bahishprajnah*’ – being aware of objects other than oneself. It is our common experience that we take more interest in other’s affairs than our own. According to Sankara this tendency is due to *avidya* or ignorance. Thus consciousness in the waking state is more related to outside objects than to one’s own inner being.

Then the Upanishad says that *vaisvanara* has seven limbs and nineteen mouths. Although this description may look bizarre, the expression ‘seven limbs’ is based upon the Chandogya Upanishad (V 18.2) which gives a description of the macrocosm as *virat* – the total structure of the entire cosmos as in the case of *visva roopa darshana* of The Lord in the Bhagavad Gita – an Universal or Cosmic form. Nineteen mouths mean five sense-organs (hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell), five organs of action (speech, handling, locomotion, generation and excretion), five aspects of our vital breath (*prana, apana, vyana, udana and samana*), mind, intellect, mind-stuff – storehouse of thoughts, and ego - sense of self (*manas, buddhi, chitta, ahankara*).

Thus the Upanishad says that the experience of *vaisvanara* consists of gross material objects of the world.

We had seen in the beginning that the *atman* is the *brahman*; the individual ego is the Total ego; the limited Self is the Universal Self. Hence the Upanishad says that microcosm (*vyashti*) is the macrocosm (*samashti*) or that the atman is having seven limbs. This is like saying that room-space is nothing other than total atmospheric space.

“The waking state is the normal condition of the natural man, who without reflection accepts the universe as he finds it. The same physical universe bound by uniform laws presents itself to all men”. _ Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

DREAM STATE

MANTRA – 4

svapnasthano antah prajnah saptanga ekonavimshati mukhah pravivikta bhuk taijaso dvitiyah padah .. 4..

The second quarter (*pada*) is the *Taijasa* whose sphere of activity is the dream, who is conscious of internal objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and who experiences the subtle objects.

Waking consciousness is nothing but a state of mind when it is aware of the external objects through its various means (i.e., through organs of perception, action, and *antahkarana*). This awareness leaves in the mind impressions (corresponding to the objects observed). In the dream state the same mind possesses impressions left on it in the waking state without any of the external means like a piece of canvas with a picture painted on it. Thus the experience of the dream state is also like that of waking state which is due to the influence of ignorance, desire and their action.

The dreamer is called the *swapnasthana* because the dream state (*taijasa*) is his sphere of activity. *Taijasa* is called *antahprajna* or conscious of the internal because his consciousness in dream becomes aware of the mental states, which are the impressions left by the earlier waking states. The subject of the waking state (*Visva*) experiences consciousness associated with external objects, whereas in the dream state the object of the experience is consciousness consisting of *vasanas*, the impressions of the past experience. This dream-state-experience is thus called the experience of the subtle.

The experiences of waking and dream states of mind are similar in nature. In both the states the experiencer is aware only of his mental states which are not related to any external objects as they are not existent. From the stand-point of dream, dream objects are as gross and material as those experienced in the waking state. From the view point of waking state alone, one may infer that the dream objects are subtle, i.e., composed of mere impressions of the waking state, in as much as in the dream state no gross object exists at all.

The rest of the mantra (seven limbs and nineteen mouths) is the same as the previous one. This is the second *pada* of the *Atman*.

DEEP SLEEP STATE

MANTRA – 5

*yatra supto na kanchana kamam kamayate na kanchana svapnam
pashyati tat.h sushuptam.h . sushupta sthana ekibhutah prajnanaghana
evananda mayo hy ananda bhuk.h cheto mukhah prajnas tritiyah padah ..
5..*

That is the state of deep sleep wherein the sleeper does not desire any objects nor does he see any dream. The third quarter (Pada) is the *Prajna* whose sphere is deep sleep, in whom all experiences become unified or undifferentiated, who is verily, a mass of consciousness entire, who is full of bliss and who experiences bliss and who is the path leading to the knowledge of the two other states.

The state of deep sleep (*susupti*) is characterized by the absence of the knowledge of Reality. The absence of knowledge of Reality is the common feature of the mental modifications associated with the perception of gross objects (waking state) and non-perception of them (dream state). In the sleeping state, a person does not see any dream, nor does he desire any object. The desire to take a thing for what it is not is absent in the state of sleep. The person in the deep-sleep state is called *susuptasthana* because his sphere is this state of deep sleep. Similarly this state is also called *ekibhutah* – the state in which all experiences become unified, a state in which all objects of duality which are nothing but objects of thought in the other two states become non-differentiated without losing their characteristics just as the day which reveals all phenomenal objects, is enveloped by the darkness of night.

Sleep is a condition wherein the mind and intellect retire and therefore it is a state of living in which all these apertures are also closed. In sleep we experience a mere all-round ignorance or complete negativity - a state which has neither form nor sound, nor taste, nor smell nor touch. Thus the only thing we know in sleep is that we have no knowledge.

In the waking state, our awareness is dissipated and scattered over sensory objects of the outside world thereby registering the knowledge of the things. In the dream state, the awareness expresses itself in enlightening the mental thoughts. As against this, in the deep sleep state, consciousness doesn't illuminate anything and it collects together in us and gets crystallized into one mass of awareness. Hence the Upanishad says that the experiences, which are nothing but forms of thought, perceived during waking and dream states, become a consolidated thick mass of consciousness in the state of deep sleep and calls it as '*prajnanaghana*' – a mass of consciousness unified.

At the time of deep sleep state there is a total absence of any mental modifications; all objects of consciousness become a mass of consciousness only wherein the mind is free from miseries of the inter-actions between the subjects and objects. Hence this state of homogeneous consciousness is called *ananda maya* that is endowed with abundance of bliss. But this is not Bliss itself because it is not Bliss Infinite. It is just as we say in common parlance that one is happy after a night's sound dreamless sleep. The Upanishad calls it as the highest bliss because of the absence of causes for the mental agitations. As this state is a threshold to recognize the dream and waking states it is called *cheto mukhah*. It is called *Prajna* because it is the knower par excellence; consciousness undifferentiated as against consciousness in the waking and dream states where awareness is associated with certain experiences. It is because of consciousness present in the state of deep sleep (without any break or intermission) we are aware of the states of waking and dream. The consciousness, which exists as *prajna* in deep sleep appears as particular (*visesha*) in the other two states. The *prajna*, thus defined, is the third quarter of the *Atman*.

MANTRA – 6

esha sarveshvarah esha sarvajna esho. antaryamy esha yonih sarvasya prabhavapyayau hi bhutanam.h .. 6..

This is the Lord of all; this is the knower of all; this is the controller within; this is the source of all; and this is that from which all things originate and in which they finally disappear.

This mantra describes such *Atman*. We find the same idea conveyed by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita as under. (the common words are indicated in bold type).

etadyonini bhutani sarvanityupadharaya .

aham kritsnasya jagatah prabhavah pralayastatha .. 7.6..

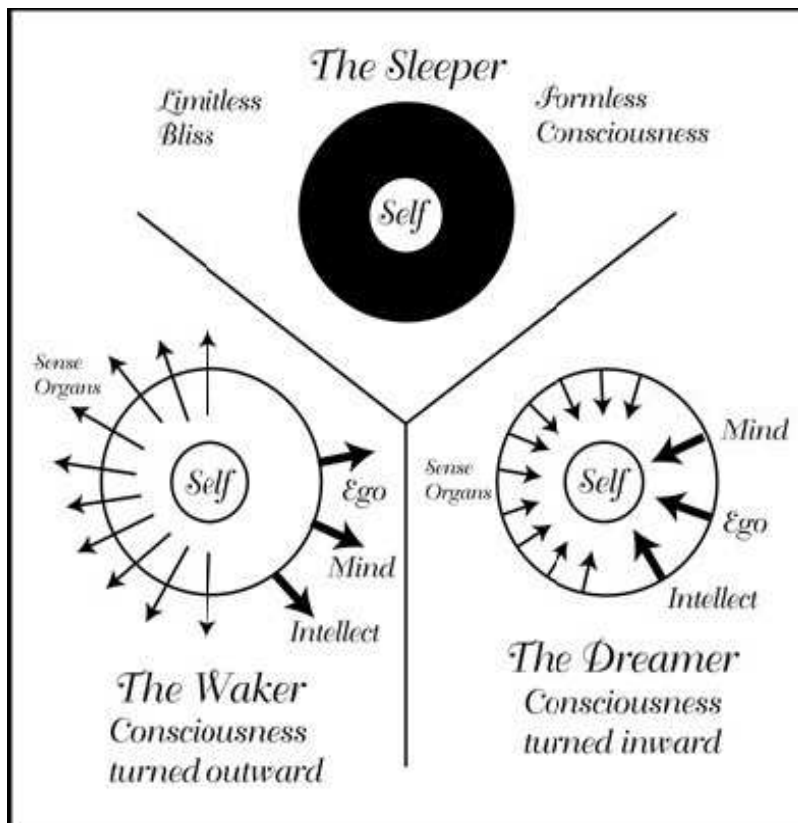
Know all matter to be born from these (the higher and lower natures-*prakritis*-of The Lord). I am the reason for the origin of the entire universe and its dissolution.

Prajna is the natural state because in deep sleep all diversities of waking and dream states merge. This state, being free from the conditions of the waking and dream states, manifests the pure Consciousness. In this state Pure Consciousness (*Atman*) is the Lord of all (*sarveshvara*). He is the Lord of all because if this consciousness is not there, we would not have been responsive at all. He is not different from the universe. He is omniscient (*sarvajna*) because he is the knower of all beings in their different conditions. He is the *antaryamin*, that is, he alone enters into all, directs everything from within. Therefore He is called the origin of all (*sarvasya yonih*) because from Him proceeds the universe characterized by diversity. If consciousness is not there in us, neither the sun,

nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the entire world of objects nor the world of ideas would have been existent. For a man in the state of comma the world just doesn't exist.

It being so, He is verily that from which all things proceed (*prabhavah*) and in which all disappear (*apyaya*). The world outside and the world within, rise up from this Pure Consciousness, exist in Consciousness and shall merge back into the Consciousness itself. When the consciousness in us is projected forth through the mind and intellect we acquire knowledge of the plurality of the world and when such projection is absent a man is considered dead. But instead of the total absence of consciousness, if the consciousness is directed beyond the mind and intellect, in such awareness we will realize the all-pervading Reality in the names and forms we see around us. What the Upanishad tells us is that the Ultimate Reality is one and that the diversities we see are only apparent but not true and hence it establishes the identity between the individual and the cosmic.

The three states of waking, dream and deep sleep has been illustrated in the following diagram.



The above diagram is from the book “MANDUKYA UPANISHAD - AN ANCIENT SANSKRIT TEXT ON THE NATURE OF REALITY” by James Swartz © 1996

(N.B. from here commence Gaudapada's Karikas(explanatory verses) interspersed between the mantras in elucidation of the Mandukya Upanishad. As the Karikas are

numerous in volume and deep in content, it is not practicable to incorporate them in an essay format like this. However a brief note is given at the end of this dissertation as an annexure giving a fair idea about the Karikas and their author, Gaudapada).

TURIYA

MANTRA – 7

naantah-prajnam, na bahishprajnam, nobhayatah-prajnam, na prajnanaghanam, na prajnam, naaprajnam.h , adrishtam, avyavaharyam, agrahyam, alakshanam, achintyam, avyapadeshyam, ekatma-pratyaya-saram, prapanchopashamam, shantam, shivam, advaitam, chaturtham, manyante, sa atma; sa vijneyah .. 7..

Turiya is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of all consciousness, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is unconscious. It is unseen (by sense organs), not related to anything, incomprehensible by the mind, uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable, essentially of the nature of Consciousness constituting the Self alone, negation of all phenomena, the Peaceful, all Bliss and the Non-dual. This is what is known as the fourth (Turiya). This is the Atman and it has to be realized.

What a soft flowing lyrical language like an early morning breeze in the spring season!

The main purport of Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real and the whole world of appearance is unreal, and that the Jiva is nothing but Brahman Itself. This abstruse theory cannot be comprehended by ordinary men of small understanding, who are immersed in the life of relativity and ignorance. They are taught this sublime Truth by means of illustrations suitable to them, so that they may fix their minds on the Reality through various angles of vision. The ancient sages adopted two popular methods to achieve this objective. They are 1. to explain the Unknown through the known by citing practical illustrations of daily life whereby its abstract truths can be understood by the finite intellect very easily and 2. to explain the Unexplainable by denying the known entities. The first method is called *Nyayas* or illustrations while the second is known as '*neti neti*' Not this, Nor this'. The great doctrine of "Neti – Neti" says that the truth can be found only through the negation of all thoughts about it. This is extensively adopted by Sage Yajnavalkya in his dialogues with his wife, Maitreyi, which are featured in the Muni Kanda or Yajnavalkya Kanda of the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad.

This mantra of the Mandukya Upanishad adopted the "Neti Neti" method to explain Turiya, the fourth state of consciousness This doctrine in this Upanishad suggests the indescribability of the Brahman, the Absolute. It is possible to describe Brahman as what 'It is not' but not as to what 'It is'. *Atman* is "neither this, nor this" ("Neti, Neti"). The Self cannot be described in any way. "Na-iti" – that is "Neti". It is through this process of

“Neti, Neti” that one gives up everything – the cosmos, the body, the mind and everything – to realize the Self. After knowing the *Atman* in this manner, one develops the attitude that the phenomenal world and all its creatures are made up of the same essence of bliss. Brahman is infinite, amorphous, colorless, characterless and formless Universal Spirit which is omnipresent and omnipotent, and like cosmic energy, it is pervasive, unseen and indescribable.

Now let us analyze the mantra. Using the language of negation it says that

1. *naantah-prajnam* – The *Atman* or life force in man is not the dreamer or that which is conscious of the internal subjective world i.e. Turiya is not the dream state or *Taijasa*.
2. *na bahishprajnam* - It is not that which is conscious of the external object-world i.e. Turiya is not the waking-state ego or *vaisvanara*.
3. *na ubhayatah-prajnam* – It is also not that state which is in between waking and dreaming.
4. *na prajnanaghanam* – In deep sleep a person experiences undifferentiated consciousness and one is not conscious of anything including oneself. But the *Atman* has no such state (*prajnanaghanam*).
5. *na prajnam na aprajnam.h* – It is not conscious or unconscious.

If none of these states are applicable to the Self then how can we describe it? The Upanishad says that one cannot describe the Self; one cannot predicate anything about it; one cannot say it is this or it is that. Once it is said that the Self is such and such, we limit the Self. Hence there is no way of saying exactly what it is. That is why it is said ‘Neti Neti’.

The Upanishad further says that the Self is

6. *adrishtam* – It cannot be seen i.e. it cannot be experienced by means of any sense organ.
7. *avyavaharyam* – It is not capable of being used by any of our organs.
8. *agraahyam* – It cannot be grasped.
9. *alakshanam* – It is beyond perception by any organ.
10. *achintyam* - It is beyond thought. One cannot even think of it.
11. *avyapadeshyam* – One cannot describe it.

Then what is the Self?

12. *ekatma-pratyaya-saram* - It is only this ‘I’ consciousness, our Self-consciousness which everybody has. This common ‘I’ consciousness is Brahman. it is the *Param Atman*, the substratum, the common base, the Cosmic Self. The Upanishad has thus very cleverly led us from not this, not this to the conclusion that we are Brahman. In the end there is only one thing that exists – *ekam atma-pratyaya* – only the “I” consciousness that is the support of the whole universe and the essence of our being.

When do we realize this?

13. *prapancha upashamam* - When the phenomenal world is negated, rejected or eliminated. The object world is nothing but names and forms – *nama* and *roopa*.

When these are eliminated what is left?

14. *shantam, shivam, advaitam* - That is peace, happiness and non-duality. There is peace because there is no diversity, no plurality, and no competition with each other. When there is unity there cannot be anything but peace and happiness.

This is called the fourth state i.e. *chaturtham*. That is Turiya. That is our real state and that is Brahman - *sa atma*

That is to be known - *sa vijneyah* – that is to be realized. By whom? We have to realize that Self by ourselves. Sankara says that we are now ignorant of our own Self; we have to remove that ignorance and then only the Self can be known. The idea is that mere intellectual understanding of the Self is not enough; what is required is to experience the Self by oneself. The means to achieve this experience is *Pranava Upasana* i.e. meditation on AUM which is the theme of the mantras that follow. In these mantras the Upanishad tells us that meditation on the constituent *matras* (parts) of the *pranava* viz., A, U, M, (to pronounce these letters as in Sanskrit - *akara, ukara, makara*) will secure for us all knowledge, glory and prosperity which the three *padas* of the *Atman* viz., Visva, Taijasa and Prajna are capable of bestowing upon man. But all these come under the sway of *maya* and therefore short-lived. To have an eternal bliss, the Upanishad advises us to meditate on partless, unified *Pranava* (AUM) thereby achieve the blissful condition of the divisionless *Atman* or Brahman.

A U M -
MANTRA – 8

so.ayam atmadhyaksharam onkaro.adhimatram pada matra matrashcha pada akara ukaro makara iti .. 8..

The same *Atman* which has been described above as having four quarters, is again AUM from the point of view of syllables (letters – *aksharam*). The AUM with parts is viewed from the standpoint of sounds (letters, *matras*). The quarters are the letters (parts) and the letters are the quarters. The letters here are A, U, and M.

The word AUM which has been explained before as *Atman* having four quarters is again explained as the same *Atman* from the standpoint of syllable where prominence is given to the name. What is the syllable? It is AUM. It is that word AUM which being divided into parts, is viewed from the standpoint of letters. How? Those which constitute the quarters of the *Atman* are the letters of AUM. What are they? They are A (*akaara*), U (*ukaara*), and M (*makaara*).

Earlier it was said that the Self can be seen in four states or quarters (*padas*); *visva* – the waking state, *taijasa* – the dream state, *prajna* – the deep sleep state and *turiya* – pure consciousness. Turiya is the real nature of the Self.

The first three states (*padas*) of the Self are represented by the three letters (*matras*) A U M. Hence this mantra says that the *padas* and the *matras* are the same. Turiya is beyond description; so it is *amatra*- beyond the *matras*.

A doubt may naturally arise as to why this repetition of explaining the same idea about *Atman*, though in different ways. The reason is that those who cannot enter upon philosophical reflection regarding the Supreme Reality as given in the previous *mantras* are advised to concentrate on AUM as the symbol of the Ultimate Reality.

MANTRA – 9

*jagaritasthano vaishvanaro.akaraha prathama matra.a.apter adimattvad.h
va.a.apnoti ha vai sarvan.h kaman adish cha bhavati ya evam veda ..
9..*

He who is Vaisvanara, having for its sphere of activity the waking state, is A (A-kaara), the first letter of AUM on account of its all –pervasiveness or on account of being the first. One who knows this attains to the fulfillment of all desires and becomes the foremost among all.

In this mantra the points of resemblance between the waking state and the first letter of AUM (*akaara* - A) are elucidated. That which is *Vaisvanara*, whose sphere of activity is the waking state, is the first letter of AUM. Their common features are tabulated as under.

Sr.No.	Waking State	First letter – <i>akaara</i> (A)
1	Pervasiveness – Entire Universe is pervaded by Vaisvanara <i>Atman</i> whose symbol is waking state. Knowledge of all other states is possible only from the waking state. The three states constitute our entire experience of the universe. Therefore the waking state pervades the whole of the universe.	All sounds are pervaded by ‘A’. It is present in all sounds because when a man wants to utter any sound, the very opening of his mouth produces (audibly or inaudibly) the sound ‘A’.
2	Waking state is the beginning of the other states. Our common experience tells us that the states of dream and deep sleep are preceded by the waking state which is therefore the first of the three states.	‘A’ is the first letter of the alphabet; it is the first of the three letters constituting AUM; it is the first of all sounds. Hence it is called the beginning because no other sound or letter precedes ‘A’. In the Bhagavad Gita (10.33) also Bhagavan says that among the letters, He is the letter ‘A’ (<i>aksharaanaam akaaro'smi</i>)

The mantra says that the one who knows the identity of the two as described above has all his desires fulfilled and becomes the chief of the great; this enumeration of merits is for the purpose of inducing the seeker to understand the meaning of *AUM*.

MANTRA – 10

*svapnasthanas taijasa ukaro dvitiya matrotkarshat.h
ubhayadvotkarshati ha vai jnanasantati.n samanashcha bhavati
nasyabrahma-vit-kule bhavati ya evam veda .. 10..*

Taijasa, whose sphere of activity is the dream state, is U (U- kaara), the second letter of AUM on account of superiority or on account of being in between the two. He who knows this attains to a superior knowledge, is treated equally by all alike and finds no one in his line who is not a knower of Brahman.

In this mantra the points of resemblance between the dream state and the second letter of AUM (*ukaara* – U) are elucidated. That which is *taijasa*, whose sphere of activity is the dream state, is the second letter of AUM. Their common features are tabulated as under.

Sr.No.	Dream State	Second letter – <i>ukaara</i> (U)
1	Taijasa or <i>Atman</i> functioning through the dream state is said to be superior to Vaisvanara because he perceives ideas whereas the latter sees only gross objects.	As the letter ‘U’ comes after ‘A’, it is said to be superior as in the case of a dignitary showing his appearance only after the lesser ranks pass through first.
2	Taijasa is in the middle between Visva and Prajna.	As the letter ‘U’ is between ‘A’ and ‘M’, the dream state is between waking and deep sleep states.

The mantra says that the one who knows the identity of the two as described above attains superior knowledge, is treated alike by all in the society, and that all the successors in his family will be knowers of Brahman or will be having full knowledge of Brahman which only means that his lineage will remain pure without any *varna sankara* or adulteration.

MANTRA – 11

*sushuptasthanah prajno makaras tritiya matran miter apiter va
minoti ha va idam sarvam apitish cha bhavati ya evam veda .. 11..*

***Prajna*, whose sphere is deep sleep, is ‘M’ (M - kaara), the third letter of AUM, because it is both the measure and that wherein all becomes one. One who knows this identity of *prajna* and M is able to measure all i.e. realizes the real nature of the world, and also comprehends all within himself.**

In this mantra the points of resemblance between the deep sleep state and the third letter of AUM (*makara – M*) are elucidated. That which is *prajna*, whose sphere of activity is the deep sleep state, is the third letter of AUM. Their common features are tabulated as under.

Sr.No.	Deep Sleep State	Third letter – <i>ma kaara (M)</i> -
1	In the deep sleep state of consciousness, both the waking state and the dream state experiences seem to enter into a mass of homogeneous awareness and on waking up out of this undifferentiated mass of consciousness i.e. the sleep state, the waking and dream states seem to emerge out separately (just as in a measuring glass liquids are poured in for measuring and poured out after measuring).	In the process of repeated pronouncing of the sound AUM, the sounds ‘A’ and ‘U’ seem to merge in and emerge out of the sound ‘M’. In this manner both ‘M’ and deep sleep state are compared to a measuring glass in the mantra.
2	In both deep sleep state and the third letter of AUM, the earlier plurality and differences merge themselves to become one-whole.	

He who realizes this identity between the two is able to measure all things in the sense that he can discriminate between things and to understand and judge the happenings both within and outside him. No situation is beyond his grasp or understanding.

MANTRA – 12

*amatrash chaturtho. Avyavaharyah prapanchopashamah shivo. advaita
evam onkara atmaiva samvishaty Atmana.a.Atmanam ya evam veda ..
12..*

That which has no parts (soundless), incomprehensible (with the aid of sense organs), the cessation of all phenomena, all bliss and non-dual AUM, is the fourth and verily the same as *Atman*. He who knows this merges his self into the Cosmic Self. (He never again feels he is an individual self).

There are no more quarters. When you go beyond the three quarters, the three states of A, U, and M, then you reach *chaturtha*, the fourth one, *turiya*. This state is pure consciousness, beyond Isvara. The gross universe is then gone. The dream universe is gone. All universes, all diversities, all dualities, are gone. You are in the state of *suddha chaitanya – turiya* and there is only your Self, *Atman*. You are liberated and there is no birth for you.

Prapancha – The five elements represented by the phenomenal world, this diversity. When you attain *turiya*, then so far you are concerned this phenomenal world is only an illusion. It comes to an end for all practical purposes (*upasama*). There is no more world for you. You see only Brahman and nothing else. Then there is only Siva, only joy, only good. And there is *advaita*, no diversity. There is only unity. You see yourself everywhere, in every being – one and the same self everywhere. You realize that this AUM is nothing but the Self, the *Atman – evam omkara atmaiva*.

He who knows this Truth attains real knowledge, transcendental knowledge. He knows that he alone exists – the entire universe getting merged in him. That is the final state. You don't see anything outside. Everything is within.

Samavisat – he merges entirely. You merge entirely into your Self. You withdraw into yourself because to you this world has no separate existence. *Atmana Atmanam* – the self into the Self. The individual self merges into the Cosmic Self. The *jivAtman* and the *paramAtman* become one.

iti mandukyopanishat.h samapta
HERE ENDS THE MANDUKYA UPANISHAD.

A bird's eye view of Gaudapada's *karikas* is given in the Annexure.

ANNEXURE

MANDUKYAKARIKA

The Mandukya Upanishad has the unique distinction of a detailed exposition by two stalwarts – Sankara and his teacher's teacher, Gaudapada. Gaudapada, about whom very little is known, wrote a detailed commentary on the Upanishad in the form of *karikas* – explanatory verses. His work is well-known as the *Mandukyakarika*. It is also known as *Agamasastra*. This *karika* is more than a commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad; it looks as an independent exposition of Gaudapada on Advaita through the means of the Mandukya Upanishad.

The *karika* has a total of 215 verses divided into four *prakaranas* or sections as under.

1. *Agama prakarana*
2. *Vaithathya prakarana*
3. *Advaita prakarana and*
4. *Alatasanti prakarana.*

The entire Mandukya Upanishad has been covered in the Agama Prakarana by interspersing the verses of the *karika* in between the mantras of the Upanishad. The other three prakaranas are completely independent expositions of Advaita Vedanta from various angles. Sankara has commented not only upon the Upanishad but also on the *karikas*.

Vaithathya prakarana : This deals with the unreality of the world by analyzing the three states of consciousness.

Advaita prakarana : This attempts to establish advaita viz., Brahman is the one and only Reality, through *yukti* or logic. instead of merely relying on scriptures.

Alatasanti prakarana : This is the longest of the four sections. It refutes 35 schools of philosophy that existed during that time, using the famous example of *alata* or a lighted torch. which, when rotated, appears as a circle of fire, though no such circle exists. In the same way, the world of duality is only an appearance and not real.

Some other important concepts given by Gaudapada are as follows:

Analyzing the *avasthatraya* or three states of consciousness (waking, dream and deep sleep states), Gaudapada tells us that it is only in the waking state that the dream and deep sleep states are negated. However, from the standpoint of turiya, which is the 'eternal state' in the *Atman*, even the so called waking state also is filled with darkness of ignorance and hence all the three states are actually the night of ignorance.

'*Ajati*' or 'non-birth' is another concept which is peculiar to this work. Since Brahman alone is real and all other objects, whether it is this world or the *jivas* (living beings) are

only appearances, there is no question of any birth or creation of this world at all. Though the scriptures have described *srishti* or creation, they have not declared it to be real.

However, following the tradition, Gaudapada accepts *pranvopasana* – meditation on *Atman* or Brahman with the help of *Om*kara – and explains the procedure in detail. On the fruits of such meditation he says:

1. Try to know OM by each of its padas (quarters). There is no doubt that *padas* and *matras* (letters) are the same. If you know OM through its *padas*, there is nothing for you to worry about. You are then blessed.
2. Concentrate the mind on *pranava* (OM). *Pranavah* nirbhayam brahma – *pranava* is Brahman and as such, takes you beyond fear. If you can fix your mind on *Pranava* there is no more fear for you.
3. *Pranava* (OM) is both nirguna and saguna Brahman. This *pranava* has nothing to which it can be traced and there is nothing which can be traced to it. There is nothing outside it and nothing alien to it. It never decays. It is always the same.
4. *Pranava* is the beginning, the middle and the end of everything. If you know *pranava* this way, you at once know Brahman fully.
5. Know *pranava* to be the Lord who resides in the hearts of all and controls them. Thoughtful person knows *pranava* to be all-pervasive. such a person is never troubled by sorrow i.e. he goes beyond both pleasure and pain.
6. He, who knows OMkara as undivided and limitless, as the end of all duality, and as all good, is truly a wise person. He is a *muni*. None else.

Another special term used in this work is '*asparsayoga*' It is the same as the experience of unalloyed bliss of the Self wherein there is no *sparsa* or contact of the senses with their objects, but only with the Self.

The *karika* ends with a definition of *moksha* or liberation as just a rediscovery of one's true nature as the *Atman* (Brahman) and a brief description of the man of liberation.

Gaudapada concludes he has realized that the Self is unique, unborn, pure and changeless. It is almost impossible to talk about a subject like this, but he has done his best. He offers his salutations to this Supreme Truth and draws the curtain down.

HARIH OM TAT SAT