

## Chapter V. Mandukya Upanishad

This *Upanishad* is the kernel of *Vedanta*, the most profound among all the *Upanishads*. It is the chief one, having the distinction of being recommended as enough, by itself, to lead man to salvation. It is very brief, consisting of just a dozen *mantras*! They are divided into four chapters: origin (*aagama*), falsehood (*vaithathya*), non-duality (*a-dwaitha*), and extinction of the firebrand (*alatha-santhi*). In the first chapter, the secret doctrine of the *Om* (*Pranava*), which is the key to self-realisation, is expounded. In the second chapter, the doctrine of dualism, the great obstacle to liberation, is discussed and rebutted. In the third, the non-dual (*a-dwaitha*) Unity is propounded. In the last chapter certain mutually contradictory non-*Vedic* doctrines are described and rejected.

No sound is beyond the ken of *Om*; they are all *Om*, its permutations and products. *Brahman* is also *Om*, identified by It and with It. The *Brahman*, which is beyond vision, is manifest for vision as *Atma*.

### The waking, dream, and sleep states are appearances imposed on the Atma

The distinctions of waking state, dream state, and sleep state (*viswa*, *taijasa*, and *prajna*) are but appearances imposed on the *Atma*; that is to say, the *Atma* continues the same, unaffected by the waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep stages of man's existence. This *Atma* and the *Atma* that one refers to as "I" are basically the same. The "I" or the *Atma* swims like a fish in the river, paying no regard to this bank or that, though the waters are limited and guided by them.

In deep sleep, all the impulses (*vasanas*) are suspended; though they still persist, they are not manifest or active. In the dream state, one follows the impulses and wins satisfaction in the process. All the manifold pulls and attractions of the sensory world, which impel one toward the surrounding objects, are born during the waking and dream stages. The mind is full of agitations, and these are the fertile fields where the impulses grow, multiply, and strike root. As a matter of fact, it is the agitating mind that causes creation (*srishti*) and that is behind all creation.

### Transcend the mind and senses: Thuriya

However, there is a fourth stage that is distinct from these three: it is named *thuriya*! This stage cannot be described by words or even imagined by the mind, for it is beyond both intellect (*buddhi*) and mind (*manas*). The experience is inadequately described as peace, grace, and oneness (*santham*, *sivam*, *a-dwaithama*); that is all. The mental agitations are stilled, so there is no more mind. It is the conquest of the mind, its negation, the mindless stage.

What a victory it is! For in deep sleep the mind is latent; while dreaming, the mind is restless with agitations; and in the waking stage it is active and motivating. In all three stages, truth remains unknown. The objective world is but a delusion of the agitated mind, the superimposition on the rope of a nonexistent snake. The world is not born, nor does it die. It is born when you are ignorant and dies when you become wise.

### AUM is the symbol of the Supreme Atmic Principle

The *AUM* of the *Om*kara, representing the stages of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep of existence, each

have a particular role in spiritual practice. Worship, which *A* emphasises more, makes one realise all desires; if *U* is concentrated upon, spiritual wisdom increases; and if *M* is specially dwelt upon in the worship, the final merging of the soul in the Supreme is effected. The worshiper of *Aum* (*Pranava*) will also earn knowledge of the truth of the world and creation. Therefore, the worshiper of the *Aum* draws to themselves the reverence of all.

The *A*, *U*, and *M* proceed from one to the other in the *Aum* and finally merge in a letterless resonance, which thins out into silence. That is the symbol of the peace (*santhi*), the auspicious (*siva*) and the non-dual (*a-dwaita*), the merging of the individualised soul in the Universal after shedding the limiting particulars of name and form. This is not all. Gaudapada's commentary on this *Upanishad*, verses 24-29, praise the *Aum* as the cause of creation. It is extolled as quenching all grief. Why? One who ruminates on the *Aum*, ever aware of its significance, can steadily move on to an awareness of the Real behind all this unreal appearance, of the Supreme *Atmic* Principle (*Param-atma-thathwa*) Itself.

### **Brahman is the cause of all causes, never an effect**

In the first section of the commentary, the non-dual (*a-dwaitic*) uniqueness of the *Atma* is established in a general way; in the second, as has been said, the positing of two entities, God and the world, is shown as empty and evanescent. In the section called specifically non-dualism (*a-dwaita*), the doctrine is established by arguments and affirmations. At first, the world was latent and unmanifest; the Creator Brahma is Himself an effect, so reflection on the effect will not lead man to the source of all things. The Brahma revealed in this *Upanishad* is not the effect; It is the Primal Cause. It is neither born nor limited; it isn't broken into all this many.

The *Atma* is like ether (*akasa*), all pervasive. It may seem enclosed in certain limits, like a pot or a room, and it may be spoken of as individualised, but there is no truth to that limitation. The body is also like the pot, which, for all appearances, limits the sky enclosed in it. There is no innate distinction between the sky in the pot and the sky outside; take away the limiting factor, and they are One. When the body is destroyed, the individual soul (*jivi*) merges with the Universal (*Paramatma*). The limitation appears to qualify the *Atma*, but the *Atma* is the Highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*) itself. The individual soul can never be considered a limb or an adaptation of the Highest *Atma*.

### **Non-dualism is the Highest Truth**

The birth and death of individual souls (*jivis*) and their wanderings in space and from one world to another are all unreal. It is appearance, not reality. Go deeply into the matter: you will find that duality (*dwaita*) or appearance is not opposed to non-duality, the substratum. The opposition is between various dualistic religions and schools of thought. For the non-dualist, all is Supreme *Brahman* (*Parabrahman*), so no opposition is known. For the dualist, there is always the atmosphere of attachment and pride and hate, for where there are two there is always fear, attachment, and all the consequent passions. Non-dualism is the Highest Truth; dualism is a certain mental attitude. So, dualism can move you only as long as the mind is active. In sleep or *samadhi*, there is no cognition of "two". When ignorance (*a-vidya*) prevails, difference is rampant; when spiritual wisdom (*vidya*) is established, union is experienced. So there is no opposition or quarrel between dualism and non-dualism. The rope is the cause of all the illusion and delusion; *Brahman* is the cause of all the illusion and delusion connoted by the word world (*jagath*).

## Attain the no-mind state with non-attachment and discrimination

It is not correct to say that the supreme *Atma* (*Paramatma*) is born as the world, for how can one's essential quality (*swa-bhava*) be changed? Manifoldness is not the characteristic of the supreme *Atmic* Principle (*Param-atma-thathwa*). The scriptures (*sruthis*) declare this in many contexts. Why, they even condemn those who see It as many. The witness of all the phases of the mind, of even its annihilation, can never be known by the mind. That witness alone is eternal, unaffected by time and space. That is the *Atmic* consciousness (*Atma-chaithanya*), the truth (*sathya*). The rest is all unreal.

Turn the mind away from the sensory world through the practice of discrimination and non-attachment; then, you attain the no-mind experience. Well, you have to remember another thing: trying to control the mind without a clear understanding of the nature of the sensory world is a vain, valueless effort; the attachment will not end, the agitation will not cease so easily.

## Transcend all agitations and attachments

Attachments and agitations sprout at the first chance. What has to be done is to develop inertness of the mind during the deep sleep stage into a stage of permanent ineffectiveness. When the conviction that all sensory experiences are unreal is well and truly stabilised, the mind will no longer function as a distracting agency; it will lie powerless, as a defunct limb. However hungry people are, they certainly won't crave for excreta, will they?

To know that the *Atma*, which is the goal of realisation, is devoid of sleep, birth, name, form and so on, to know that It is eternally self-effulgent (*nithya-swayam-prakasa*), is to transcend all agitations of the mind. Attempting to curb the mind without the aid of discrimination, or attempting to make known the unreality of objects is as foolish and fruitless as attempting to empty the ocean using a blade of grass. Be firmly fixed in the conviction that the world is a myth; then, you can aspire to perfect peace (*prasanthi*) and fearlessness (*a-bhaya*).

## Cause-effect nexus is delusory ignorance

As the motivating force behind every birth or product, there should be a purpose, either existence (*sat*) or nonexistence. Exactly what transformation takes place? The cause (*karana*) undergoes change (*vikara*) and gets transformed into the effect (*karya*). Well, existence has no change, so no birth is possible from it. Nonexistence is void, so nothing can emanate from it. Existence and nonexistence are inconceivable together. Therefore, logically, nothing can be born or produced; cause cannot become effect.

When you remember fire, you don't feel the heat. Only when you hold fire in your hand do you experience the heat. So too, all objects are different from knowledge (*jnana*) about them. Knowledge is one thing, actual experience is another. Moreover, the search for the first cause is an endless adventure. Even in the complete absence of the snake, one sees it in the rope. It is all a figment of the imagination. In dreams, with nothing concrete, all the joy and sorrow of manifoldness are undergone. For the machinations and inferences of the mind, no basis or explanation is needed. Irresponsible inferences about the unreal world will pester the mind as long as the illumination of truth is absent. The clasping of delusion is the fate of those who are steeped in ignorance (*a-vidya* or *a-jnana*).

This *Upanishad* declares in unambiguous terms that existence (*sat*) can never be the cause for the effect

(*karya*) viz. nonexistence. The external world is created by our own subconscious mind (*chittha*), like smoke emanating from a burning incense stick. Everything is appearance, a superimposition, an apparition —something mistaken to be there but really nonexistent. The atmosphere of ignorance (*a-jnana*) is the fertile field for their birth and multiplication. Worldly illusion, which has the dual characteristic of evolution, of origin and ruin, is the fruit of this mistake.

### **Transcend pulsating consciousness, which is the cause of creation**

Since the supreme *Atma* (*Paramatma*) is the whole being (*Sarvatma-swarupa*), no possibility of cause-effect or wish-fulfillment or purpose-product appears in it. For one who has had the vision of *Atma*, all is *Atma*. The illusion-infected (*maya*-infected) seed will sprout into an illusion-infected tree; both are false and fleeting. So too, both the birth and the death of the individual (*jivi*) are false; they are mere words, signifying nothing. The things seen in dreams are not distinct from the dreamer, are they? They may appear as different and as outside of the dreamer, but, really, they are part of the dreamer, arising out of their own consciousness. One who is the witness has no beginning or end. That one is not bound by duties or obligations, right or wrong. To know this, and to get firm in that knowledge, is to attain liberation from the shackles. It is the quivering of the consciousness (*chittha*) that causes things to originate. Pulsating consciousness is the cause of creation.

Contemplate on this and reach up to the union stage (*thuriya*) of consciousness. Then, name, form, object, and being (*nama*, *rupa*, *vasthu*, and *bhava*), all get merged in the one all-pervasive all-inclusive *Atma*!

This *Upanishad* teaches man the essential philosophy, in the briefest terms. It does not refer in the least to activity (*karma*) or kindred subjects. It concerns itself purely with the science of the *Atmic* Principle (*Atma-thathwa*).