



## The Essence of Mandukya Upanishad

Mandukya Upanishad is one of the shortest Upanishads, but it is praised as the best Upanishad for achieving 'Self Realisation'. For the aspirants having quest for 'Moksha', understanding this Upanishad is sufficient. This is emphasised by Lord Rama to Hanuman in Muktiopinshad.

The inner meaning of the Mantras in Mandukya Upanishad is not easily comprehensible to many people. So, the inner meaning is explained here in detail, to make it easy to understand for a common man. For an atheist or materialistic person, it tries to satisfy their arguments with logic based on their own experience of daily life.

It is tough to understand that real nature of our "Self", due to false impositions of body and mind made on it due to Ignorance. has become inherent in everyone. To remove this ignorance of false impositions, different Upanishads took different ways of explanations like– three states of Consciousness theory, cause and affect theory, five sheaths theory etc.

Like a Scaffolding where in a temporary structure is erected to support people and material for the construction of a building and removed once it is done, in these theories false impositions are explained to make people understand and slowly remove them to expose the real nature of the Self, which is Consciousness or Awareness.

The main objective of all Upanishads is to make eligible aspirants recognise their real nature. In simple terms to understand clearly the answer, when an individual poses a question

"who am I?".

Mandukya Upanishad answers this question by analyzing the three states of Consciousness.

**The essence of Mandukya Upanishad is explained here in the form of question by a disciple(D) and answer by Guru(G):**

**D: when there are many theories, why it is said that 'Three states of Consciousness theory' is better.**

G: 1) Because, this theory is easy to understand. In other theories the aspirant has to learn many definitions of the words used in them. But in this theory it is easy to understand, as the three states which are -waking, dreaming, deep sleep are in the experience of all everyday.

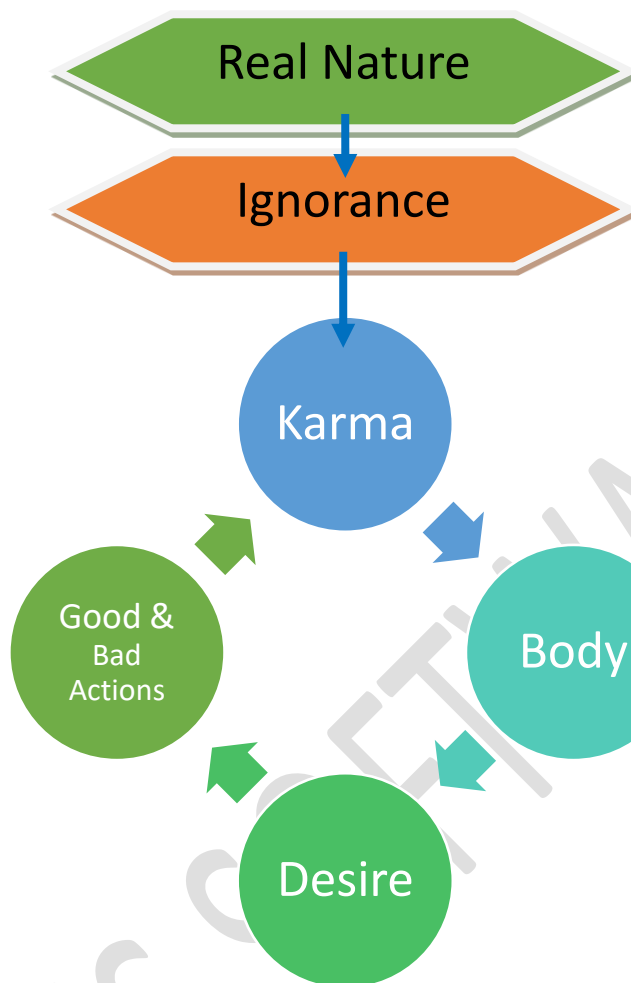
2) This theory is quoted in different other Upanishads like-Chandogya, Bruhadaranya, Kathopanishad, Muktikopanishad, thereby hinting the importance of this theory for those who earnestly seek Self-realisation.

The result of Self Realisation is to remove 'Ignorance' and cross 'Birth and death' cycle- which is also called 'Samsara wheel'.

The Samsara wheel is :-

- Because of Karma, we get body
- Because of body, we develop 'desires, likes and dislikes' which result in 'Love and Hate'.
- Because of them we make 'Noble and Ignoble' actions
- Because of actions, we accumulate karma
- Because of Karma, we get body.

For all the above 'Ignorance' is the root cause.



**D: What is Ignorance?**

G: When we perceive an item as real, which is unreal.

Ex: Like rope is viewed as snake by mistake. Similarly, thinking body and mind as Self or Atma.

Once ignorance is removed through knowledge, then one will realise that the Self or Atman is the person's real nature and recognise himself as Brahman or Paramatma.

This Upanishad helps the aspirant to recognise 'Self' through the three states a person experiences daily.

**D: what are these three states experienced by a person?**

G: Waking, dream and deep sleep states.

**D: why God has given three states to human being?**

G: God is kind enough to give these three states, so that humans will enquire deeply and recognise the underlying nature as their true Self.

**D: when we are experiencing these three states every day, why the real nature of these states is not becoming clear to us?**

G: Like how frogs, fish living in river Ganga do not know the greatness and affect of the river, similarly, though humans are experiencing the three states, they are not recognising their significance and unable to grasp the inner divine essence.

**D: Out of three states which is important?**

G: Though all states are equally important, humans show partiality towards 'waking' state. But, when we are trying to understand the essence of 'Self', we have to give equal importance to all states.

**D:** In deep sleep state, there is nothing.  
The dream state is temporary, also dreams vary every day and none of the items in the dream can be brought to waking state for analysis. So, it is illusional.  
But, in waking state, our day-to-day transactions, past and present objects remain same.

The dream and deep sleep states are the result of hard work done by the body in the waking state, for relaxation. Despite experiencing dream and deep sleep states every day, they are not useful for enquiry.

**So, why can't we just analyse the waking state, as it is the main state?**

G: If dream and deep sleep states are not important, why God would have given us these states?

Sleep need not be treated as just relaxation.

Because, if it is so, then,

- who has worked less, should get less sleep
- who has worked more, should get more sleep
- who has not worked, should not be getting sleep at all.

But it is not happening like that. kids and old age people who do not work sleep more. And sleep vary for other ages irrespective of work done by them. So, it is not correct to say that dream and deep states are for relaxation, when the body

and senses are tired. So, it can be concluded that there is some useful purpose for the creation of these states by God.

D: But still waking state should be treated as main state, as only objects in the waking state are useful, but not the objects of dream world. Items required for daily functioning like food, clothes, house are available in waking state only. Aspirants can find guru in waking state only.

**So, is it not fair to give importance to waking state?**

G: When we are in waking state, this life seems to be real. When we are in dream world, we experience it as real and don't feel it as an illusion. So, we can't assume that waking state is real and dream state as an illusion. The reason is, we do not know that we are dreaming and do not experience waking state in dream.

So, both are felt as real by our senses. So, we can resolve that both states should be either real or both illusional.

As the waking world objects are useful for waking state, the objects in the dream are useful for dream state. If we treat the objects of dream world as illusional and not useful in waking world, then we have to treat the objects of waking world as illusional and not useful in dream world. Though for practical day to day transaction level, waking world may seem to be important, but to understand the under lying truth, we have to be impartial to all states, as there are things to enquire in all three states.

**D: what are there to enquire in dream and deep sleep states?**

G: These are the points to ponder on these two states.

In dream state, you experience different varieties of dreams. Who is experiencing the dream, when your body is lying on bed? You have become the total dream world, including yourself, other persons and objects. But, at the same time, dream is experienced by you as a subject observing the objects. How has this great miracle become possible to you while you are lying on the bed?

In deep sleep or blank state- what is the reason for not experiencing the waking or dream world? Then where are you? What is power available in deep sleep state, which gives energy to body, mind and senses? What is nature of that state in which everyone experiences unexplainable happiness? When you are in deep sleep, where and in which form the objective world resides?

**D: what to be done next?**

G: The aspirant should understand and realise that both the waking and dream state experiences are nearly identical.

Later to compare the experience of dream with waking world daily and enquire whether the person called 'I' or 'Me' appearing as himself in waking and dream are same or not?

**D: what is purpose of enquiring whether the 'I' in waking and dream are same, when it is obvious that it is 'me' who is in the dreams?**

G: To understand better, let us go through this story:

*One day when King Janaka was sleeping, his sentry came running in and cried, "Maharaja, wake up. The enemy king has attacked our kingdom." King Janaka woke up, and without any preparation or preplanning he came to the battlefield with his army. A fierce battle was fought, and king Janaka was defeated at last. He was wounded and exhausted. The victor king, who was the new ruler of Janaka's kingdom, banished Janaka from that kingdom.*

*So, Janaka fled to the adjacent kingdom. There as he was hungry, saw that poor people were being offered food. He then stood in the long queue and was left with only starch. Janaka was happy to take that. As he was about to eat, the bowl dropped accidentally. Janaka then cried out in misery.*

*The sentry came running in and asked, "What happened Maharaja?" King Janaka woke up only to realise that he was dreaming. But he had an analytical mind, so he asked, "Is this real or was that real? Is this the truth or was that the truth?" The sentry was taken aback. He called the Queen, and Janaka asked her the same question. She too got confused. He went on asking the same to everyone, but none of them was able to understand his question.*

*Meanwhile, the news of the king's weird question reached the ears of the great Sage Ashtavakra, who readily understood why the king was asking such a question? The next day Sage Ashtavakra visited Janaka's court. King Janaka, on seeing the great sage, asked the same question, "Was That true or is This true?"*

*The great sage then counter questioned him. "When you were defeated, were all these wealth and kingdom of yours- real or not?"*

*The king answered, "No, they weren't!"*

*Ashtavakra again asked him, "And now that you're sitting here on your throne, are those experiences of defeat, misery- real or not?"*

*The King replied "No!"*

*Ashtavakra said. "So, Raja, neither that is real nor this is real". King Janaka was confused and questioned, "Nothing is true - Both are unreal?"*

*Then Guru asks him - Were you there when you were as a Beggar in dream?" King says "Yes I was there."*

*Guru- "Are you here when you are as a King?"*

*King says, "Yes I am here."*

*The Guru says "This 'I' which is witness in both dream and present waking worlds is real"- and asks him to find who is that 'I'; which is truth and his true reality.*

Guru continued-

So, from the above discussion, the individual 'Me' is different in waking state, dream state and it is also present in deep sleep without any individuality or objective world.

Let us take one more example:

Supposing you have met with an accident, and you are in hospital with a leg injury.

Later, while sleeping you have got a dream that you are cycling in a different country on the road.

Are both persons same?

**D: Though it is 'Me' -because I am lying on the bed, they should be different.**

G: Similarly, when you are in deep sleep, are you there? If so, is he the same person lying on bed?

**D: There is no presence of 'Me' as individual. But I am able to say that I slept without any dreams or objects.**

G: So, the person in waking and dream are different and there is no one as an individual in deep sleep.

When you as an individual is different or not available, how are you are able to say that I dreamt cycling on road or there is nothing in deep sleep?



**D: 'Me' as an individual, though I am in hospital, dreamt as cycling on road and after the dream is over, I got up and I could remember and recollect the dream.**

G: Generally, remembering can be done based on one 'place- time' zone. For example, a person who is observing objects and incidents in a particular city can recollect the things happened. Because here things happened in equal 'place-time' zone. Then it can be said as remembering.

But, as waking and dream states are not having any connection, the 'place-time' zone of them are different. Like in a particular time zone, two cities can exist, but there is no support to claim that waking, dream states are in same 'space-time' zone. And 'space-time' zones do not exist in deep sleep.

**D: But we are experiencing our friends, relatives, and some scenes from waking state in dreams, so there should be connection.**

G: If there is connection between each state, you should be able to take some fruit from waking state to dream state or you can bring the cycle from dream to waking state. This is impossible. Only in equal 'place-time' zone, objects can be taken from one place to another.

Ex: Rice purchased in a shop and cooked at home can be eaten. As shop, rice, house are all in same 'place-time' zone. But if you are sleeping at night in India and might dream that you are cycling in the morning in another country, the two incidents 'place-time' zones are different. So, there is no cause and affect relation between these two states.

**D: Sometimes wife, kids, relations, friends and places seen are visible in dream, so it appears to have connection between waking and dream states.**

G: It appears so, but not real. In dream, we experience seeing and talking with relatives or friends who died long back as real. You realise it as illusionary after waking up.

Can you say to your friend that-"I met you in the dream and you have taken money as loan". Will your friend accept this and repay back your loan?  
No- because there is only illusionary connection but not truly.

**D: Can you give more explanation that there is no connection between these states.**

G: To effectively say that there is no connection- the experience we are having in each state is restricted to that state only. Like when you are experiencing a dream in the dream state, the waking world is non-existent. Similarly, when you are experiencing the objective world in waking state, you feel that dream world is non-existent. And when you experience deep sleep, both waking and dream worlds are non-existent.

**D: But, when we are experiencing deep sleep, many people are doing their transactions in the waking world. It doesn't mean that since we are sleeping, the waking world is non-existent. It is continuing its existence as usual.**

G: we have discussed on 'place-time' zones. Your argument points that you are experiencing sleep state and others are experiencing waking state at the same time, and since it is impossible, your argument is not tenable.

Apart from that, when you are dreaming or in deep sleep, you are not aware that others are awake.

Similarly, when you are dreaming, you don't assume that others are also dreaming. The dream world cannot be found, when you want to search in waking world. The world experienced in dream is restricted to dream state and world experienced in waking is restricted to waking state only.

So, to conclude there is no 'cause and affect' connection between different states and their worlds.

**D: But I can say that 'I had dream and recollect the experience of dream' and I am also able to say that 'I had no dream' after deep sleep- how is that possible?**

G: These three states seem to be present based on the assumption that there is an individual entity, who is doing transition through them. There is no individual who experiences the waking world and goes to dream after sleep. There is no transition of same 'I' from one state to another.

Since it is now clear that the 'I' in waking state and 'I' in dream state are different, but there is one 'entity' which is illuminating and knowing both the waking and dream states and also able to say that 'nothing' is present in deep sleep. That entity which we call 'I' is 'Consciousness'

'Consciousness' alone is present as witness and experiencer of all three states. It is because of this 'Consciousness', which is present and witnessing all three states, you are able to say that I had a dream or no dream.

**D: How it can be said that individual is not there?**

G: First, Individual is illusory because, individual assumed is different in waking, dream states and not present in deep sleep state.

It is a common belief that an individual person comprises of 'Body & Mind' known as 'I or Me' which experiences the waking and dream world.

We consider that this 'person', an individual entity, travels from one state to another and taking rest in deep sleep.

But, when you are sleeping, your body is lying on the bed. But as a dreamer you are having a different body.

Do you have an experience that you are having a dream and you are present as the dreamer of the dream?

No! You are the apparent subject of the dream and you experience and interact with others as if you are in the waking world. But the subject i.e., your body is lying here on the bed.

When we wake up, we treat dream as illusory and also note that the 'individual'- the apparent subject of the dream appeared as one of the characters of the dream. The experiencer of the dream was in-fact experienced within the dream.

Also, this is not happening through mind, as it is not available in Deep sleep.

So, no individual is transiting from waking world to dream. The 'individual person' was in-fact an image and thought of the Consciousness both in the dream and waking state.

It is the Consciousness which is present in the three states not an individual.

**D: Then how are we experiencing the waking and dream world? Can't I claim that through body and mind, I am experiencing the waking world?**

G: The individual, which we think comprises of body and mind inside is also illusory, seen only during the waking state, as it is different in dream state and disappears in deep sleep state.

Let us analyse-

Mind is experienced only through 'thoughts and images'

Body is experienced through 'sensations'

World is experienced through 'sense perceptions'

All that we experience are thinking, sensing and perceiving. The mind, body and the world are appearances of Consciousness.

Consciousness is present in deep sleep as its own unmanifest reality. The same Consciousness takes the shape of dreaming and waking states. Consciousness is their substance as well as their underlying substratum.

**D: How does Consciousness appear as objective world ?**

G: As explained, the objective world is made up of sense perceptions. It can be said that Consciousness appears to conceive first mind, which perceives body and senses, which give birth to time and space, which in turn give birth to either waking world or dream world.

Consciousness conceives and takes the shape of the perception but remains as itself. When the perception disappears also it remains as itself.

Ex:1 Just like when an image/object appears in front of a mirror, it takes the appearance of an object without any change and remains as it is even if the image/object disappears. But in Consciousness everything appears within it.

Ex:2 Like on a LED TV screen images appear or different forms of waves, foam, bubbles appear in water.

So, everything is appearing in and experienced by Consciousness.

**D: How it can be said that Consciousness is experiencing?**

In our experience, how “thinking, imagining, sensing, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling” are known?

They are made through knowing or experiencing- correct?

Suppose if knowing (awareness) or experiencing were removed from them- what would happen? They do not exist.

And what is knowing or experiencing is made of? It is made of Consciousness. We cannot experience anything without being conscious or when we are unconscious. And we cannot go back of Consciousness and see it as an object. It is conscious, witnessing presence which experiences whatever is being experienced from moment to moment.

That witnessing Consciousness is pervading all the states and experiencing the waking and dream states. ***This is what we call as 'I' or 'Me'.*** This 'I' is one common consciousness which is experiencing all three states.

**D: How can this be proved experientially?**

G: Dream state is the proof which is experienced by all every day. Consciousness appears to manifest as the world, people, objects in dream and you experience as if you are in the waking world- thinking, sensing, perceiving.

All this is created by Consciousness alone. It is same experience we have in waking state.

**D: How is it possible that Consciousness can become world on its own?**

G: The Consciousness, which is present in deep sleep state as unmanifest, remains as substratum and substance of waking and dream worlds. It conceives and experiences within itself the waking and dream worlds.

Later in deep sleep, It abides in Its own unmanifest condition, in which everything is enfolded in potential. As there are no objects, our waking mind interprets that state as blank or void.

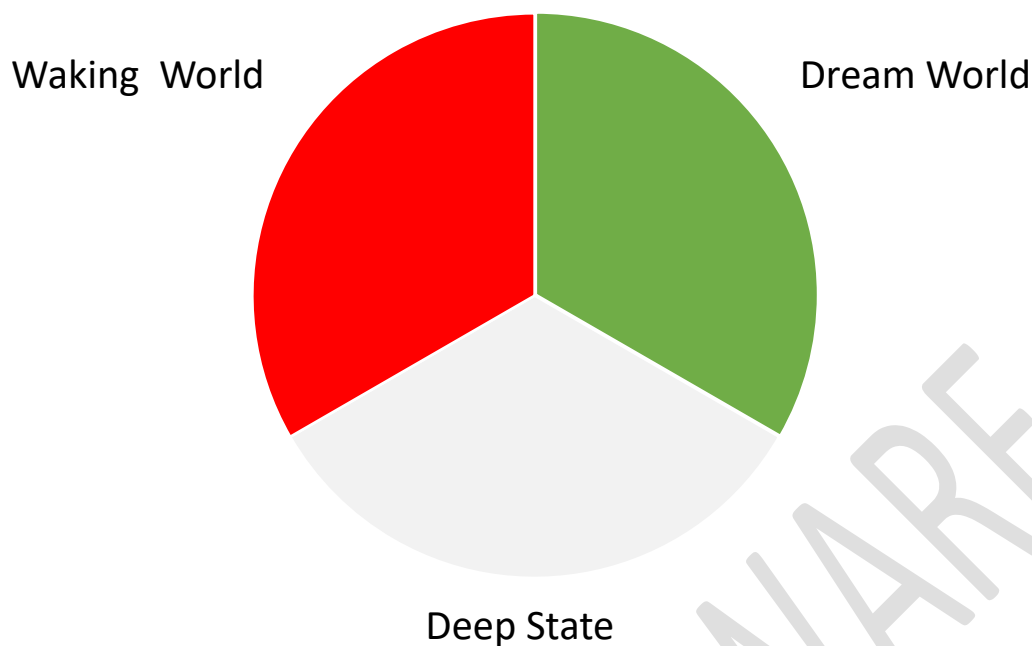
Ex: In a ocean, in which the substratum is 'water', the waves appear and disappear.

Similarly, the objective world in waking and dream worlds appear in Consciousness.

Let us understand through another example explained by Mr. Rupert Spira:

Let us take a white paper and 'draw' a circle in it.

Divide the circle into three parts- as shown, and colour one portion with red colour, another portion with green colour and leave the third part without any colour.



Let us assume that the whole white paper is 'Consciousness'. Inside the circle, assume red colour as waking state, green colour as dream state and blank or white colour as deep sleep state. It can be now said that white paper is the substratum for all three assumed colours or states. Waking state (red colour) is appearing on the white paper, dream state is appearing as green colour on white paper and deep sleep state is appearing as it is (white colour).

So, on the white paper- red and green colours are appearing on it and no colour in the third part.

Similarly, Consciousness appears as waking world, later as dream world and in deep it abides by itself. Actually, there is no deep sleep state, but said to be there in relation to waking and dream states, like white (blank) colour is there in relation to red and green colours. But the whole white paper which is white in colour is the underlying background for the red and green colours; and remained as it is without any colour in the circle.

Similarly, 'Consciousness' is the underlying substratum for waking and dream states and remains as it is by itself in deep sleep.

*Ex: On a movie screen, suppose two movies are screened and stopped.*

*Let us assume Movie 1 as waking state.*

*Let us assume Movie 2 as dream state.*

*Let us assume deep sleep state as blank screen after movies stopped.*

*The screen (Consciousness) is the background on which changing Movie 1 (waking) and Movie 2 (dream) appeared and remained as blank screen (Consciousness) without any appearance. Just as the two movies seen on the screen, these waking and dream states appear in Consciousness.*

*And this Consciousness or Awareness is what we call 'I', our 'Self' or 'Atma' which is our real nature. And that is what you are. Tat Tvam Asi (Thou Art That)*

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