

MANDUKYA UPANISHAD

An ancient Sanskrit text on the nature of Reality

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Vedic culture is based on the Vedas,¹ books of knowledge of great antiquity. The four Vedas are divided into three parts. The *mantras*, the earliest portion, are hymns to the power of nature which is seen as a kind, tolerant and merciful, yet mighty, severe, and unrelenting deity. The *Brahmanas*, are detailed instructions needed to perform rituals and meditations that produce certain sought-after and limited results: wealth, progeny, a happy afterlife, health, etc. Such knowledge is valuable for those who believe that happiness comes from outside themselves.

A few of us doubt that lasting happiness comes from the pursuit of desired objects and/or the performance of finite activities, religious or otherwise, in a time-bound world and, for whatever reasons, are convinced that happiness comes from within. The *Aranyakas* or Upanishads, the third portion of each Veda, commonly known as Vedanta, agrees and delivers an “absolute”² knowledge that, under the right circumstances, reveals the limitless blissful Self and destroys the suffering arising from the belief in oneself as a limited being.

Actions, subtle and gross, can only produce things not immediately available. For example, if I live in San Francisco and want to go to New York I need to catch a plane, or drive a car. But the Self, the limitless I, our true identity, is eternally present, the nearest of the near, so no action will help me reach it.

One day a devotee said to God, “Please give me a head on my shoulders.”

God thought long and hard about the request and concluded that, in spite of His omnipotence, He could do nothing. So He said to the devotee, “I can give you another fatter head. I can move your present head to a different location. I can shrink or expand your head. I can put a dozen heads on top of your head. I can twist your head into the shape of a pretzel. But I cannot give you a head on your shoulders because you have a head on your shoulders.”

“So what should I do?” the devotee asked.

“I think the only way to solve the problem is to realize that you already have a head on your shoulders,” said the Lord.

I can only get something I already have through knowledge.
But knowledge doesn't happen by itself. It must come through a vehicle or instrument.

THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

Perception, inference, and language are means of knowledge. The means of knowledge we use is determined by the type of object we want to know. For example, if I want to see a sunset I can't use my ears. Knowledge of thought depends on intellect. To understand feelings I should have a heart.

The means of knowing relative things is obvious, but the knowledge revealing the limitless I is subtle because it has to remove a deep and hidden obstacle, the ignorance of my limitless nature.

For the means to operate properly, assuming a clear message is coming from the scripture through the teacher, the mind must be trained to listen.³ Listening with an open mind requires disciplined and consistent setting aside of cherished views of oneself and world. A means of knowledge is not brainwashing, accepting a new belief system; its only purpose is to deliver of a clear vision of truth, the limitless I.

Simply hearing that one is free of limitation is not enough. Doubt comes from incomplete and incorrect thinking and is only removed by careful and patient reflection. Meditation as a thought-free state or religious ritual as devotional practice are valuable tools for purifying the mind, but

will not remove self doubt. So, along with the knowledge that I am limitless Awareness, I should follow the method of thinking enjoined by the scripture, the negation of all incorrect views about the nature of the world and myself.

The most formidable obstacle to the assimilation of the truth is the thought “If only I were different or the world were different, I would be happy.” Looking forward to an ideal inner or outer situation is futile because life and oneself is already and always perfect. When this thought is removed the mind enjoys limitless vision. So spiritual practice, meditation if you will, is the struggle to purify beliefs supporting the notion of oneself as a limited being.

Words can only reveal known objects. For example, the word ‘television’ wouldn’t have been understood a hundred years ago. Words only work to describe substances, properties of substances, actions, species or classes, and relationships, so how can the limitless I, which is apparently not an experienced object and obviously beyond these categories, be revealed through the teachings of Vedanta?

If I say “tree,” a tree thought takes place in the mind because we have experienced trees, but the words “limitless I” don’t mean anything to most of us because we think of our ourselves as limited I’s. And the limitless I is the part of ourselves that can never be objectified, so it seems words won’t work to reveal it. However, if the thought that we’re limited is a delusion and the limitless I present and accounted for, an intimate part of every transaction, words can reveal it.

Vedanta tackles the word problem by first informing me that I’m an unlimited I. That I’m limitless is indicated by the fact that though I have literally hundreds of thousands of unique experiences in my lifetime, I continually experience myself as a simple conscious being, one transcending all experiences. The same I, unaffected by time, witnessed my baby body, youth body, adult body, and feeble old-age body and their myriad transactions.

WHAT LIMITLESSNESS DOESN’T MEAN

To say we’re unlimited by nature does not mean that if we knew who we were we could walk on water, fly like birds, or leap tall buildings in a single bound like Superman. Nor does it mean that we are omniscient, endowed with extraordinary psychic powers, capable of zipping around the cosmos in our spirit bodies. With rare exceptions, the body and mind are limited by Nature and behave in conformity with its laws. And one could hardly imagine a more limited phenomenon than a miracle.

A common example of limitlessness is the “peak” experience when the sense of limitation temporarily dissolves and the person feels completely happy, carefree, peaceful, loving, rich, and powerful. In deep sleep we experience limitless and bliss. Though seemingly a momentary feeling, limitlessness is the most fundamental fact of our existence, our own forgotten nature. That it’s our nature is indicated by the fact that whenever I feel this way I never try to rid myself of the experience, unlike limitation, which I always view as a serious disease.

Though it’s my nature I don’t see myself as limitless because I’m identified with my limited selves. Not to put too fine a point on it, when I negate and cease to identify with my relative selves, (which is the purpose of this Upanishad) my non-negatable limitless Self is (hopefully) realized by default. The rediscovery of oneself as a limitless awareful Being is known as liberation or enlightenment.

The trick lies in recognizing oneself as limitless awareness without turning oneself into an object. When we turn ourselves into objects we suffer. In a dream a man decided to try to find his waking self and looked high and low with no success. Dejected, he sat down under a tree when he heard a voice from the sky say, “Why don’t you wake up.”

Surrendering his status as a dreamer and leaving the dream world, he discovered the waker by becoming the waker without turning himself into an object. In fact, the dreamer was the waker, temporarily identified with the conditions in the dream world. Similarly, from the point of view of the limitless I, all waking state entities are consciously or unconsciously searching the limitless I in a state that doesn’t contain it as an object. The only way we are going to discover what we’re searching is to awaken from this waking dream.

In the twilight a thirsty traveler approached a village well. Reaching down, she recoiled in fear when she saw a big snake coiled next to the bucket. Unable to move for fear of being bitten, she imagined terrible things, including her own death. At that time an old man coming to the well noticed her predicament.

“What’s the problem?” he asked kindly.

“Snake! Snake! Get a stick before it strikes!” she whispered frantically.

The old man burst out laughing. “Hey!” he said, “Take it easy. That’s no snake. It’s the well rope. It just looks like a snake in the darkness.”

Though never in danger, the misapprehended rope produced intense fear. Our existential fears and desires come from mistaking the limitless I for the limited I. The fear of the snake arose simultaneously with the

misapprehension of the rope and, significantly, vanished when the rope was correctly perceived.

In the Mandukya Upanishad, an English rendition of which is given below, the rope represents the limitless I and the snake the limited I broken into three sub-I's: the waker, dreamer, and sleeper and their respective worlds.⁸ In the story, the traveler, who represents anyone striving to know who they are, makes a mistake and sees a snake where there is only a rope. This superimposition⁹ of our limited self or selves on our real or limitless I (which is going on all the time) is the cause of much suffering. The removal of this error is the purpose of the Upanishad.

This mistake, a symbol of normal perception, took place in twilight, which represents the waking entity's partially-conscious state of mind. In broad daylight (full knowledge) or pitch darkness (total ignorance) no such error could have occurred. Because we're so obsessed with the objects of perception and the limited I's reactions to them, in normal perception we vaguely or incompletely see the limitless I even though it's an intimate part of every transaction. And we are unaware that the snake needs the rope, borrows its reality from the rope. Meaning that my life exists because I exist, not the other way around. Even if we are superficially aware of our Consciousness we don't understand that deep inquiry into it confers freedom and endless bliss. Our story has a happy ending because the snake disappears into the rope and the traveler's suffering ceases. In reality, the disappearance of the snake, all our false conceptions and discriminations, except in exceptional cases, comes about after long and patient inner work.

The aim of the Mandukya is to analyze the creation¹⁰ and arrive at truth, the limitless I. But the analysis of the creation, as modern science will testify is daunting because every advance in knowledge opens up a new area of ignorance. So the Upanishad takes a shortcut. By equating the limitless I, Consciousness, with the world, as it does in the first mantra...“The whole cosmos is the word AUM”...we come to understand the world by inquiring into the Self.

The world as we know it is not a strange Sanskrit term. Physically we see it as matter, the elements in various permutation combinations, and psychologically we understand it as subtle matter: thought, feeling, perception, knowledge, memory, dreams, fantasies, etc.

In what sense is everything we experience the word AUM?

Words are sound symbols. Of what is AUM the symbol? Modern science tells us that matter is just energy in a state of motion, vibration. The energy that becomes different types of matter by vibrating at different frequencies is symbolized in Vedic science as AUM because, it is said, this

sound encompasses all the sounds the voice box is capable of creating. While the idea is logical, the fact that mind and matter are vibrating energy, not the symbol, concerns us here.

What is the nature of this energy? Just as matter is energy in a state of vibration, energy is Consciousness apparently vibrating. While energy is a moving form of Consciousness, Consciousness itself is energyless, all-pervasive, and unmoving. So how does the unmoving Consciousness, AUM, become dualistic, capable of movement? The best explanation I've found is that from Consciousness' point of view there is no dualistic, vibrating, energy-filled universe. But from the point of view of a mind, seen through a vibrating mind, the universe apparently dances.

Nonetheless, because our bodies and minds are insentient matter, they can only be moved by something else. And that something else is Consciousness. The materialist view, which has arisen because the senses are taken as the sole means of knowledge, that mind evolved from matter is patently illogical since evolution implies a conscious agent. Though unmoving by nature, Consciousness is capable of inspiring movement in Its vehicles.

Are the vehicles different from Consciousness? Is the spider different from its web? Though apparently different from the spider, the web, being part and parcel of the spider, is non-separate from it. It is the spider minus the intelligence to create and manipulate its creation. Likewise the universe, AUM, though apparently a vast field of vibrating subtle and gross matter, is nothing but subtle and gross forms of Consciousness. How far, the sages say, is the wave from the ocean?

Seen through the filter of time the limitless I is said to be the cause of which the universe is an effect. Is the cause separate from its effect? The effect is the cause in a different form, just as a pot is not separate from the mud that sustains it. If we are little pots of consciousness how far can we be from the Consciousness that sustains us? How far can we be from the Consciousness that sustains all pots?

In this sense, the whole universe is Consciousness, symbolized by the word "AUM."

The Mandukya's definition of AUM, the limitless I, is: "**That which exists in all periods of time, past, present and future, before the past and after the future.**" And we can add a secondary definition: **That which exists in all states of consciousness and beyond is AUM.** Anything not conforming to this definition isn't real. Experienceable, yes, temporarily existent, but only seemingly real. Since all forms of Consciousness, mind and matter, don't fit the definition, for the purpose of someone striving for

Self knowledge they are not the limitless I. To discover myself as the limitless I, I have to see who I am minus the body and mind. When I'm one hundred percent convinced I'm the limitless I alone, I can take back the forms without suffering limitation.

Since only one I fits the definition and It is present and accounted for, its analysis is straightforward. If, for example, I wish to understand the nature of water I needn't drink from every river, lake, and ocean in the world. I need only analyze one drop. If the creation is the limitless I, I need only inquire into myself to find out the nature of everything.

THE WAKER, DREAMER, AND DEEP SLEEPER

As human beings we have three 'egos' or experiencing entities. The first, the waking state ego, (See the bottom left third of fig.1) is Consciousness¹², the limitless Self, shining through the body-mind-intellect bundle experiencing the world of material objects and the subtle world of feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas, memories, etc.

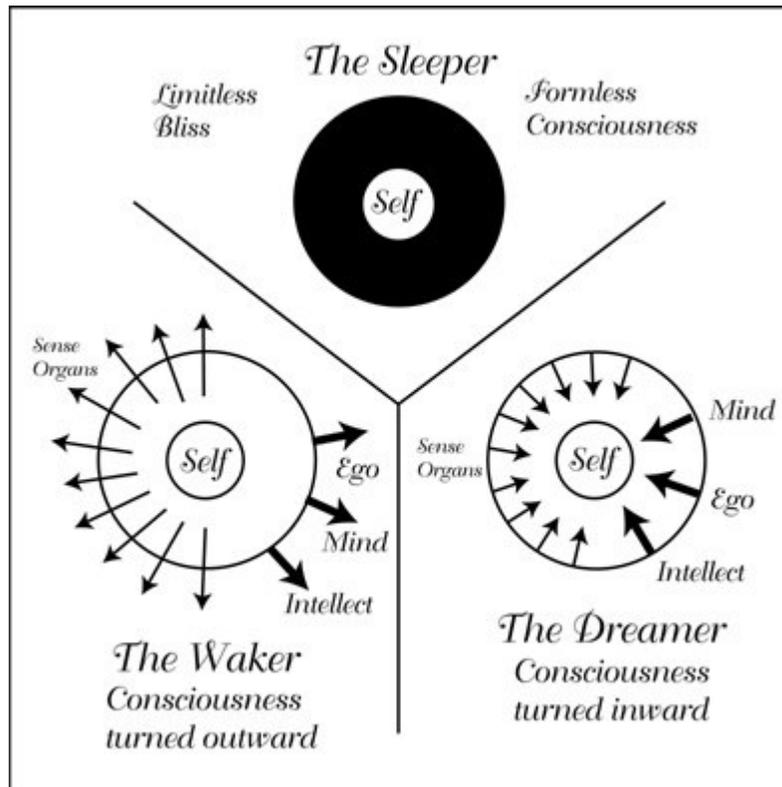


fig. 1

Everyone primarily views his or herself as a waker. When I say “me” in conversation, I am referring to myself as a waking state entity. The belief that I am a waker, and, as our analysis will show, it is only a belief, comes with the conviction that the waking state physical, emotional, and intellectual objects are real.

The waker’s consciousness is turned outward, the Self shining through the senses, mind, intellect, illumining their respective objects. When idealistic metaphysics claims there is no world apart from the perceiver, it is simply saying that the Self doesn’t see a world unless it shines through the body, mind or intellect, not that the physical world doesn’t exist. Though existing independently of the waker’s perceptions, it doesn’t exist apart from Consciousness, the Self.

The waker, *vishwa*, is a consumer of experience. The Sanskrit literature describing the waker calls it “the one with thirteen mouths.”¹³ The “thirteen mouths refer to the ten senses, mind, intellect, and ego. These instruments are mouths in that, powered by the momentum of past experiences, they aggressively seek experience in the present. The physical body consumes matter, the five elements¹⁴ in various permutation combinations; the mind constantly chews emotion; the intellect eats ideas; and the ego gobbles any experience it believes will make it feel whole, adequate, and happy.

The dreamer, (the lower right side of fig.1) consciousness turned inward,¹⁵ enjoys a world similar in some respects to the waking state world and radically different in others. In the dream state The Self illumines only subtle objects, a replay of the *vasanas*¹⁶ (note the small “v’s” circling the Self in the waking and dream states.¹⁷) gathered in the waking state expressing in pictorial form. In the waking state the *vasanas* express as the waker’s thoughts and feelings. Like the waker, the dreamer believes he or she and his or her world is real. The dreamer is equipped with the same instruments for experience as the waker: dream senses to consume dream objects, a dream mind to emote and feel, a dream intellect to think dream thoughts, and a dream ego to go about the business of experiencing the dream life.¹⁸ The dreamer is referred to in the Upanishad as *taijaisa*, the “shining one,” a term indicating its nature as Consciousness. All dreams appear in light, even though the waking senses are inactive, because the Self, Consciousness, is shining through the dreamer, just as it shines through the waker.

Sleep is defined as the state, saturated with happiness, where one loses consciousness, doesn’t desire any external objects, doesn’t see any internal objects, and is both Self and self-ignorant.

The sleeper is called *pragna* or mass of consciousness. In the other states consciousness flows outward and inward but in sleep it loses direction and becomes formless. The sleeper ego is extremely subtle, its presence indicated by the fact that we experience limitlessness and bliss. In the waking and dream states bliss is sporadic because it is broken by many divisions of thought and feeling. We know of the sleeper's experience because it reports a good sleep after transforming into a waker. Were the waker actually a different ego from the sleeper, or the dreamer, it wouldn't recall the experience of sleep or dream.

The deep sleep state is free of both waking and dream egos and objects because the *vasanas* projecting them have become dormant; hence it is referred to as the "seed" state. When the "seeds" sprout, one becomes a waker or a dreamer and experiences the appropriate world.

Because we don't remember being conscious in it, the sleep state is often thought to be a void by metaphysicians and philosophers. In fact Sanskrit literature refers to it as 'the womb,' because our waking and dream worlds emerge from it. When you wake up in the morning your whole life is neatly laid out consistent with the day before, the same language you spoke yesterday on the tip of your tongue, indicating that previous experience had simply entered a dormant state. The dormant potential of the sleep state containing the macrocosmic *vasanas*¹⁹ is called *Ishwara*, the Creator, in Vedantic literature. With reference to the microcosmic *vasanas*²⁰ the sleeper is called *pragnya*.

The sleep state is also known as the gateway between the waking and the dream states because it functions as a kind of closet with two doors where the dreamer can don the guise of the waker to appear on the waking stage. And vice versa. Though a minor point, even in cases where one seems to be awakened directly out of a dream by a noise, for example, the dreamer passes through the sleep state. A motion picture image of a stationary object is actually dozens of individual images passing so fast they seem to be a solid object. Similarly, we can't trust our experience in this case because the change is so fast we don't notice it.

Though they seem so, the three selves are not actually separate entities but apparently distinct entities created when the limitless I associates with a given state of consciousness. Associated with the waking state, the Self 'becomes'²¹ a waking state personality, suffering and enjoying as the case may be, the limitations of the physical world, the senses, mind, intellect, ego, unconscious, and self-ignorance. The dreamer suffers the limitations of the mind, the unconscious, and self-ignorance. And the sleeper, the Self

apparently merged into the unconscious, suffers only self-ignorance and limitless bliss.

These three states and egos are known to everyone and constitute the totality of the limited I's experience. An interesting question posed by this analysis, and the point of the Upanishad, is "Who am I?" If I'm the waking ego, which I've been totally convinced I am, what happens to me when I become a sleeper? I willingly surrender everything essential to my idea of myself (my body, mind, intellect, and all my physical possessions) and turn into a mass of limitless Consciousness²².

Yet I don't seem to be content as a sleeper ego, the blissfully ignorant subtle being, because I sacrifice that status to suffer and enjoy the world created by my *vasanas* in waking or dream states. My dreamer identity is obviously equally insufficient because I always leave it to become a sleeper. So my status as any one ego or ego aspect is limited and my true identity open to question.

Furthermore, if identity is happiness, any ego identity is limited since the happiness experienced in sleep disappears in the waking state. Dream happiness dissolves on waking, and waking happiness cannot be transported into sleep or dream.

IF I'M REAL I HAVE TO EXIST ALL THE TIME

The answer to "Who am I" is that I am not any of these egos or ego states. If I'm real I have to exist all the time. I can't suddenly be one thing one minute and something else the next; I experience life as a simple single complete conscious being. In fact I exist in the waking, dream, and deep sleep states independent of the waker, dreamer and deep sleeper.

As what?

As the limitless I, the Awareness, the common factor and witness ²³ to the three states. (*Note in fig.1 that the Self, the white circle in the center of all the states, exists in all three states without modifying it's nature.*) Outside of meditation,²⁴ the Self is probably easiest to recognize in the dream state because the physical senses are inactive. The dream is playing on the screen of the mind like a movie and even though physical light is absent and the eyes closed, the dream ego and the events in which it is participating are clearly illumined, a phenomenon referred to as "lucid" dreaming. The lucidity is the limitless I temporarily functioning as the dreamer, "the shining one." However, identification with the dream ego and its doings prevents us from properly appreciating the dream light, the Self.

The Self is unknown in the waking state for the same reason. Preoccupied with the happenings in our worlds and minds, we are completely unaware that both the sense objects and our thoughts and feelings are bathed in the subtle light of Awareness.

In deep sleep the ego/intellect is dissolved into its source, the dormant seeds of its past actions, so it isn't aware of either the Self or anything external.

The three ego's are called *upahdis*, limiting adjuncts, in Vedanta. An *upadhi* is something that apparently covers or conceals the nature of something else. If I put clear water in a colored glass, the water, seen through the glass, appears colored. Similarly when I look at myself through my waking, dream, and sleep personalities, I seem to be three distinct personalities. However, when I remove the *upadhi* I can see what I really am. The removal or negation of the *upahdis* is simply knowing they are unreal, not going into some high or "spiritual" state to get rid of them. The *Yoga shastra*²⁵ says liberation depends on destruction of the mind but Vedanta says that the more one struggles to remove the thoughts the more one lends them reality, reinforcing one's Self ignorance.

The waker and the dreamer, which are just different ways of discussing a Self-ignorant person, are fractured into many sub-identities, *upadhis* within an *upadhi*, so that most of us are dealing with a confusing array of selves, none of which are real. Remember, 'real' in metaphysics means enduring, unchanging, unlimited. Because something is experienced does not make it real, the snake in the rope, the blue sky, and the rising sun, for example.

With reference to my son, I'm a father. With reference to my father, a son. With reference to my wife, I'm a husband. To my boss I'm an employee. I'm a devotee with reference to God and a taxpayer with reference to the government. With reference to myself I'm a success, failure, victim, victimizer, sports fan, audiophile or any of the thousands of ready-made identities available today. The many often conflicting roles we play as waking and dream state egos are limited by each other, other selves playing similar or different roles, and our ideas about the meaning of these selves. Caught in this thicket of identities, is it any wonder I suffer? In the end, spiritual life, no matter what the path, always boils down finding out who one is minus all one's roles and experiences.

Not that there's anything "wrong" with role playing. Society only functions efficiently when our roles are well-defined and we play them impeccably. But when we identify ourselves completely with our roles we suffer. Spiritually, identification with the role, not the role itself, is the

problem. For example, though an actress identifies herself with the character, she seamlessly returns to her original identity when the curtain falls. Even though the audience completely believes her illusion, she remembers her real self throughout.

After patient analysis I can see I'm not any of these personalities. What am I then? The limitless I. And what is the limitless I? The limitless I is called the substrate²⁷ in Vedanta. A substrate makes the error that I'm limited possible. The rope in our example, is a substrate, something whose nature is so subtle it is possible to mistake it for something else. The fact that I'm formless Consciousness makes the playing of myriad roles possible.

A substrate is also the essence, a form reduced to its ultimate nature. For example, a ring, a bracelet, and a necklace are three forms into which gold can be crafted. If the three are melted down, their forms are destroyed but nothing substantial is lost because the gold, their essence, remains. Meditation on the nature of ourselves melts down the waker, dreamer, and sleeper destroying the relative I's and leaving the limitless I shining as the innermost Self of the seeker.

When I look more carefully into this conscious being I find that I'm whole and complete. Nothing is missing. Because nothing is missing I'm peaceful and desireless. If I'm peaceful and desireless I never change. When I look into my limitlessness I discover that I'm free of everything. Being free of limitation means that I'm eternally blissful, as I am in sleep. When I look into my bliss I see that my nature is pure love.

If my real Self is like this, what need is there to assume limited identities? Or, better yet, knowing who I am, I won't get caught up in the limited identities life asks me to play. Self-Realization, enlightenment, liberation, salvation is not a mind-blowing mystical state but simply the condition of someone abiding in his or her real nature. To suppose that one must enter a transcendental superconscious state to lose the waker, dreamer, sleeper identities is untrue. The enlightened sleep, dream, and carry on a normal waking life - minus the feeling of limitation bedeviling the unenlightened. Free of the expectation that experience should bring lasting happiness, they never deny duality, only its apparent reality, because, like the snake in the rope, it isn't actually there.

VEDANTA AND MEDITATION

Even a careful reading of the Mandukya or a few teachings at the feet of a scriptural master would probably not produce the firm and lasting

knowledge of oneself as the limitless I. So in the eighth century a great sage, Gaudapada, added a meditation to the verses to help the seeker realize the Self. In this meditation the three states are symbolized by three sounds and the “forth state,”²⁸ the limitless I, is referred to as soundless. Meditation on the three states confers certain benefits, but meditation on the Silence with right understanding²⁹ produces liberation.

Silence is twofold. Relative silence, a negative state, is merely the absence of sound and not the Self. Because sound is so distracting, spiritual literature often prescribes cultivating relative silence. But the Upanishad’s definition of sound includes mental and emotional noise. Often, only in relative silence do we realize how disturbed our consciousness is. The absence of thought is also relative silence. This is why a blank mind is not enlightenment.

The second kind of silence is “absolute.” Absolute means not opposed to sound. Absolute Silence is best realized in relative silence and could profitably be described as the Silence/Awareness because of which both sound and relative science are known. The absolute Silence is the Self, the Limitless I.

So how to get to absolute Silence?

A SIMPLE TECHNIQUE

The following simple technique, as old as the hills, introduces the meditator, the seeker, to the limitless I, the sought.

THE BODY

Our relationship with the body reflects in how we sit. If holding the body up is difficult for physical reasons, lying down is acceptable if the tendency to sleep can be overcome as the mind empties. Some go for the full lotus, the less physical the half-lotus or the simple meditative poses evolved by Hatha Yoga. In India where yoga evolved people have no furniture so sitting cross-legged on the ground is second nature. If you’re forever having to smile benignly through the pain in your feet because they’re resting on top of the thighs, it’s best to opt for an easy chair. Except for the attempt to awaken dormant energies in the body, a practice not recommended for neophytes, the position of the body isn’t critical. It should be comfortable and the meditator prepared to take a short vacation from it.

ATTITUDE

On the mental level the pose should be kingly or queenly: gracious, upright, poised, noble, and generous. A careful, sensitive, inquiring state of mind, like a botanist patiently examining a delicate flower, is suggested. The meditator should think of meditation as an afternoon on the beach, not a shift in the mines.

When the eyes are closed and you've settled in, what's next? Ask for help. Obviously, if you knew who you were you wouldn't be meditating in the first place, so by sitting down you are really saying you don't know anything, the most essential ingredient. Most who get as far as the idea of meditation believe in a higher power, a God, a spirit guide, a guru figure, the saints, the universe, "guidance," a deity - whatever. Irrespective of the invocation's form, the limitless I, will respond. The Self put the meditation idea in the mind in the first place so everything that needs to happen will happen.

Make a resolution to leave your worries and involvements behind. It's good to meditate in a place that isn't used for other activities. Feel satisfied you are making an effort to meditate. Third, clear the mind of memories of previous meditations, good or bad. Trying to improve on a bad meditation or reproduce a good one is futile and only agitates the mind.

BODY SCAN

After the invocation the first part of the meditation involves scanning and relaxing the body from the feet up. If you have a hard time relaxing your feet use a little visualization. Imagine you are in your feet as a ball of warm peaceful light-filled Consciousness, and expand your presence until the feet are hollow. Then bore your way up the legs relaxing all the muscles, releasing tension in the ankles, knees, and hips. Take your time. It may seem a cheap trick but isn't as farfetched as it seems because the body is a vast field of consciousness, not a constipated little ball of matter. If the "ball of light" doesn't work physically relax your way up the legs. Spend a bit of time working on the abdominal and stomach regions to neutralize the lower part of the trunk. Because they are associated with the power and fear chakra and waste removal these organs often carry negative energy. Move up and explore the chest. Its connection with the emotional center causes angry and unforgiving feelings to lodge there, so the muscles are often tight. Leisurely scan this area leaving it light-filled and relaxed; then work up to the neck and shoulders. Much mental tension accumulates here so take your

time. When its relaxed move out to the tips of the fingers and hollow out the arms like you did the legs. Then redo the neck and shoulders.

The face we carry around in the world usually isn't our real face so we need to do something to get it back to normal. Work around the chin, mouth, and cheeks first, then up to the eyes and forehead. You'll find lots of vibrations hovering around these regions so release the muscles supporting them and let them dissolve. When you've finished the face should be expressionless. A smile or frown means too much energy's been left behind. Aim for the indifferent look of a Buddha, or the peaceful face of the dead.

The idea behind all this scanning and relaxing is to prepare the body for your exit. Thinking of the body as an automobile and yourself as the driver may be helpful. The driver has returned from a long day on the road, is going to park the car in the garage, and enter his or her warm comfortable home for the evening. Before you park it for good, check the whole thing to see that it's comfortable in its seat and turn your attention to the breath.

THE BREATH

The breath, as you have probably noticed, goes in and out nicely on its own. The idea in the first part of this meditation is to watch the breath, not breathe consciously, although you may notice that observing the breath consciousizes it a bit. Not to worry. It will soon settle down and return to its normal pattern. Although a sophisticated yogic science of breath control has evolved, working with the breath is not profound. As far as meditation is concerned we don't want to control anything. Control means ego and a lot of work. And the point of meditation is to relax, not just physically but mentally. Watching the breath gives the mind something to do, keeps it out of trouble.

As mentioned above, the mind always wants a bit of change, a little glamour or excitement and doesn't appreciate hard work. Before long the meditator will find watching the breath boring. But boring's good. Learning to enjoy boredom is one of the benefits of meditation.

At this point I give the mind a challenge by training my attention to ride on the breath as it goes in and out. When the breath is out the attention is out and when the breath comes flowing in, the attention comes with it, as if riding on an upside-down swing.

Of course the mind will have its little trips, so you might discover it trekking in the Andes or eating chateaubriand at the Twenty One club between the inbreath and the outbreath. The meditator should pull it back, try to synchronize it with the breath. You don't have to be one hundred

percent, get the mind to ride perfectly on every breath. Don't bother to get upset if it doesn't work immediately. Take your time. It will come. Anyone can do it.

Meditation's not about the breath anyway. The breath is just a tool. How long should one work with the breath? There's no hard and fast rule, sometimes five or ten minutes, sometimes longer. What you're looking for is a sign that the mind is getting quiet because it settles down quickly when synchronized with the breath.

If you see that the mind and breath are synchronizing, use surplus attention to release pent-up thoughts and feelings on the outbreath. Don't relate to or analyze the thoughts at this point, simply pay attention to what you're doing, and let the mind empty on its own. Just as the outbreath cleanses the body, releasing thoughts detoxifies the mind. From a meditative perspective the meditator's relationship to the thoughts is more important than the thoughts themselves. Later when you're seeing from the Self it may be helpful to analyze them, even though ultimately all thoughts are useless.³⁰ At this point don't worry about losing them, they'll be back. The mind will never completely empty, so don't worry. The point is to take a little pressure off, help it quiet down.

THE SILENCE

The mind is becoming quiet when you start to be conscious of all sorts of sounds you weren't previously aware of. You never hear the clock ticking because the mind, formerly occupied with its thoughts, is emptying. You may hear the heart beat, the scratching of the breath as it goes in and out, snippets of conversation taking place blocks away, the hum of the kitchen refrigerator, a fly buzzing lazily in the adjoining room. The thoughts may be amplified, larger than life, or slower, as if they were slogging through molasses. You might start picking up on them as they start rather than at the end of their cycle.

You will notice these things because you are now surrounded by a bubble of Silence which, depending on the quietude of the mind, may be hardly noticeable or roar as it does out on the great plains in the dead of a summer night.

When the Silence appears as a tangible presence, take your attention from the breath and fix it on the Silence. Because it's served its purpose, the breath should drop out of consciousness, or seem very light, faint, far away, irrelevant. Sometimes the mind gets completely swallowed by the silence and you find yourself deep within your Self, unaware of the breath, the

noises in the room, your thoughts, absolutely everything - a state similar to conscious sleep. Time dissolves and you are overcome with an ecstatic peacefulness, difficult to describe.

Many unusual experiences can happen when the mind is quiet. Let them happen, don't cling. All experience, like thought, is essentially transitory, not subject to ego control. And the purpose of meditation is not to produce specific pleasurable experiences but to inquire into the nature of the Self and the mind.

Unless you're aiming for *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the state without thought, which will not give Self knowledge,³¹ see that you remain alert and allow the senses and mind to function. The presence of thought does not affect the Silence. The ideal situation is to observe the thoughts and sounds appear into and disappear out of the Silence like phantoms. The silent peaceful Awareness in which they appear is experienced as a rocklike, real, luminous and eternal presence. The experience of the Silence is the essence of meditation because it lets the meditator observe first hand the insubstantiality and unreality of the body/mind instrument, in a way reading books and listening to lectures can never do.

If the ego insists on intruding, making itself uncomfortable in the Silence, trying to distract like a needy child, you can teach it to surrender, allow the thoughts and feelings to arise and fall without interference. I think of the Silence as the altar of the inner temple and take great pleasure witnessing the thoughts and feelings arise out of and disappear back into It. The discipline of meditation involves a struggle with the ego to keep attention fixed on the Silence. If the Silence is particularly deep or radiant the ego will be so stunned it will surrender completely, like an awestruck kid at a carnival. But this is not always the case, not because the Silence is unattractive but because powerful *samskaras* carry the attention far afield.

One wouldn't think to visualize or chant anything at this time because the experience of the Silence itself is fascinating and fulfilling. However, sometimes the mantra arises spontaneously, chanting itself. Occasionally, when a particularly subtle part of the Unconscious is active, wonderful inner visions manifest.

The meditation is not creating the Silence, although it may seem so. The Silence is the substratum of all experience, the self-luminous Consciousness that is the source of every perception - the limitless I. The meditation technique simply withdraws enough consciousness from the body and mind to allow the ever-present and apparently-hidden Silence to manifest.

Once the meditator is proficient in contacting the Silence the question of what the Silence is and what sort of relationship one wants will arise. Although there are no rules, I like to encourage the meditator to explore the boundaries between his or her waking/dreaming self and the Silence.

The Silence is the most tangible manifestation of the Self, the realization of which frees one from suffering. There are many ways to relate to the Self but I like to see it as an intimate friendly lover, in whose presence I feel terribly comfortable. Try surrendering, melting into Its compassionate embrace, allowing the watcher, the concentrator, the meditator, to dissolve into it. When the ego opens up to the Silence its cleansing waters flood in, healing body and mind.

The Silence may not seem so much like silence as Peace, a sense of being completely at rest, fulfilled, and unconcerned, the “peace that passeth understanding.”

Or as inexplicable bubbling blissfulness.

Or limitlessness, emptiness, and fullness.

Contact of the mind with the Self can be described in many ways, all equally valid, but **experience of the Self through the mind is not Self-Knowledge, Enlightenment.**

Enlightenment is the re-discovery of oneself as the Self.

The question of what illumines the blissful, silent, peaceful Presence needs to be answered. How is this Self, which is routinely ignored in the waking, dream, and deep sleep states suddenly available for experience? It can't be known through the senses, or through the mind in its normal thought and emotion-dominated state, so how is it known? Is there someone other than It illumining It or is It illumining Itself? What is the nature of the Self and how does it relate to the “me” I think I am?

Meditation, all the little tricks, working with the breath and mind, simply creates an inner environment conducive to the exploration of the Self. As mentioned, most seekers have an exaggerated and fantastic notion of enlightenment. Because their views are so unrealistic they're not going to get it even when it's staring them straight in the face.

The best source of knowledge on the nature of the Self is scripture, particularly very old texts, the Mandukya and other Upanishads, for example. These sources, representing purified, factual, collective knowledge can be trusted because no specific ego is responsible for them. For example, the following verses from an Eighth Century text, Atma Bodh, by Shankaracharya, a reformulation of Upanishadic ideas written in the first person, presents the Self as pure knowledge.

*“By negating conditionings³² with the
knowledge “I am not this”
realize your identity as the Self
as indicated in scripture.*

*The three bodies³³ are perceived objects
and as perishable as bubbles.
Realize through pure discrimination
I am not them.*

I am infinite non-dual pure Consciousness.

*Because I am other than the body
I don't suffer its changes.
I am not born nor do I die.
I have no sense organs
so I am uninvolved in the world.*

*Because I am other than the mind,
I am free from sorrow, attachment, malice and fear.
Scripture says I am pure, without thought and desire
and so I am.*

*I have no attributes.
I live without breathing.
I am eternal, formless and ever-free.
I am the same in all,
filling all things with being.
I am infinite non-dual pure Consciousness.”*

The seventh of the Mandukya's twelve mantras describes the Self like this: *“It is neither conscious of the external or internal worlds (because from its standpoint there are no worlds), nor is it a mass of consciousness (because it is uniform throughout, like space).”* This description is designed to negate the waker, dreamer, and sleeper.

The text continues: *“It is not simple (as opposed to complex, made of parts) consciousness. Nor is it unconscious (inert, insentient). It cannot be seen by the senses, is incomprehensible to the mind, uninferable,*

unthinkable, and indescribable.³⁴ Its nature is pure consciousness, negating all phenomena, non-dual, blissful, and peaceful.”

EXPERIENCE VERSUS KNOWLEDGE

While we can't avoid it, using the language of experience to describe the Self or enlightenment can be potentially misleading. People customarily talk from the point of view of a subject looking out at an object. The objects, one's experiences, are invariably the points of interest to them and others, not the subject, the one reporting them. If someone says they saw a blazing light without limit, the 'blazing limitless light' captures one's attention and will be assumed to be the content of the experience. However, the Consciousness, referred to as "knowledge" in Vedantic literature, witnessing the light is the essential ingredient and the light nonessential because without Consciousness nothing is experienced. Were the light the Self, it would be conscious that it was being witnessed, but subtle objects of experience, like dreams and visions, are never conscious.

Seeing a light or lights is a common experience which should stimulate inquiry. What 'light' is illuminating the light? Who saw the light? That 'who' is you, the Self, whose existence is in no way validated by a particular experience. In fact, without knowledge of what we're seeking the meditator can easily become addicted, living from experience to experience, craving more and more, building a grotesque spiritual ego.

Aside from an irrefutable proof that one is not who one thinks one is, which should pique curiosity about one's real nature, the Mandukya's three-state analysis might be profitably employed in meditation to discriminate the three egos and their states from the Self. After the detailed analysis of the three states, Gaudapada says that waking and dream are really dream states, because both the waker and the dreamer, who are merely egos experiencing thoughts and feelings as their primary realities, are Self ignorant, the only difference being that the physical body is active in the waking and not in the dream.

Still, thought and feeling is Consciousness in form, just like waves are the ocean. By tracing the thoughts to their source, the waker/dreamer entity, the thinker/feeler can be separated³⁵ from the Illuminator and negated. Occasionally in meditation, the mind empties sufficiently and the waker/dreamer becomes a sleeper. Extreme vigilance is required to allow the waker/dreamer to become the sleeper without losing contact with the basis of the discrimination, the limitless I. However, the experience of

watching the sleeper allows the meditator to understand the sleeper as an object, not-self.

The following is an English translation of the Mandukya Upanishad.

(1) *Om, the Word, is all this,³⁶ a clear explanation of which follows: all that is past, present, and future is Om. Whatever is before the past and after the future is Om.*

2) *All this is the Limitless I.³⁷ This Self³⁸ is the limitless I.*

(3) *The first quarter (of the Self) is the waker whose field is the waking state, who is conscious of the external world of objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys the world's gross objects.*

(4) *The second quarter is the dreamer whose field of experience is the dream state, who is conscious of the internal world of objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and who enjoys the subtle objects of the dream world.*

(5) *The third quarter is the sleeper in whom all experiences become undifferentiated into a mass of consciousness, and who is the gateway to the waking and dream states. In the deep sleep state the sleeper neither sees or desires subtle or gross objects.*

(6) *The sleeper is the Lord of all manifest existence. It is the knower of all, the inner controller, and the source of all. The sleep state is that from which all things originate and into which they all dissolve.*

(7) *The Self is known as "the forth" and is to be realized. It is neither conscious of the external or internal worlds, nor is it a mass of consciousness. It is not simple consciousness, nor is it unconscious. It cannot be seen by the senses, is unrelated to anything, incomprehensible to the mind, uninferable, unthinkable, and indescribable. It's nature is pure consciousness, the negation of all phenomena, non-dual, blissful, and peaceful.*

(8) *Viewed as sounds the Self is A, U, M.*

(9) *The one who meditates on the waking state as "A," the first and most pervasive, fulfills all desires and becomes a leader.*

(10) *The one who meditates on the dream state as “U” because it is between and superior, attains superior knowledge and is treated fairly by all. In his line of descendants everyone attains Self knowledge.*

(11) *The one who meditates on the sleep state as “M” as the measure and that wherein all things become one is able to realize the nature of things and beings and understand all things within himself.*

(12) *That which is partless, soundless, incomprehensible, beyond the senses, blissful, non-dual and that wherein all phenomena are resolved is the “forth,” the Self. The one who knows It dissolves the self in It.*

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ *Veda* means knowledge in Sanskrit.
- ² “Absolute” in the sense that desire underlying one’s need to know the meaning of life is laid to rest once and for all.
- ³ *Shravanam* in Sanskrit.
- ⁴ *Mananam*
- ⁵ *Nididhasana*.
- ⁶ Freedom from limitation.
- ⁷ A special “spiritual” state of mind
- ⁸ “World” is a psychological term, meaning “field of experience.” In the context of this Upanishad the three worlds are the realm of the senses, the world of dreams, and world of sleep.
- ⁹ Projection, in psychological language.
- ¹⁰ The three selves, their instruments, and fields will be presently explained.
- ¹¹ Om is a sound symbol of the limitless I. In a scientific sense the verse means that the whole world is made of Consciousness in a state of vibration.
- ¹² The word “Consciousness” as defined in Vedic texts is consciousness devoid of modification, thought and feeling. In the West the term refers to the modifications taking place in consciousness. I have capitalized it to make the distinction clear.
- ¹³ In fact the text says nineteen mouths because it includes the “five *pranas*,” the physiological systems and “*chitta*”, memory.
- ¹⁴ Air, fire, water, earth, and space. These elements are called the *Virat*, the macrocosmic gross body.
- ¹⁵ Consciousness can’t in fact turn inward or outward because it is all-pervasive, like space. The consciousness referred to is the mind.
- ¹⁶ The impressions of past experience, also termed “*samskaras*” in spiritual literature.
- ¹⁷ See Chapter 2 Meditation, The Science of the Self, by the author.
- ¹⁸ The substance of the dream field, thought and feeling, are drawn from the macrocosmic mind, *Hiranyagargha*.
- ¹⁹ The impressions of the experience of all beings over limitless time. Creation, according to Vedanta, is simply the recycling of unmanifest experience.
- ²⁰ The personal subconscious, impressions of a particular individual.
- ²¹ The limitless I never becomes a limited experiencer in fact, but seems to be an experiencer when associated with a particular *upahdhi*.

²² One of the most common Sanskrit terms for limitlessness is “*ananda*,” which literally means “without an end” and is generally rendered in English as “bliss.” The sleep state is a blissful experience because consciousness is not broken up into thoughts, feelings, and perceptions as it is in the waking and dream states.

²³ Although from It’s standpoint there are no states to illumine, the apparently real states are only known because they are illumined by the Self.

²⁴ An example of a meditation to contact the Self is given later.

²⁵ The Patanjali Yoga Sutras

²⁷ *Aadisthanam*

²⁸ Nowhere does the Upanishad refer to a “forth” state of consciousness. The Self, to set it off from the waker, dreamer, and sleeper is referred to as “*turiya*,” the forth.

²⁹ That I am the Silence, limitless Awareness.

³⁰ Useless with reference to contacting the Self.

³¹ Self knowledge takes place in the mind, but if the mind is non-existent how can it take place?

³² The three egos and their states.

³³ Refers to the gross, subtle, and causal bodies which correspond to the waking, dream, and deep sleep state.

³⁴ All descriptions are not to be thought of as capturing the Self in words. The words might be profitably thought of as tracks leading toward the Self, down which the mind may travel. Or signs pointing in It’s direction.

³⁵ The separation is not physical, but a discrimination of the mind.

³⁶ All existence.

³⁷ Om is the Limitless I

³⁸ *Atman*, the Limitless I associated with the individual “soul.”

³⁹ Though all-pervasive, the Self, for the purposes of meditation, is assigned these three locations.

⁴⁰ The Self.