

**THE MESSAGE OF THE MĀṆḌŪKYA UPANIṢAD
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MIND AND
CONSCIOUSNESS**

RAMAKRISHNA PULIGANDLA

We are all aware that the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad is the briefest but most important of all the Upaniṣads, in that it contains the gist, the heart, and the essence of the entire Upaniṣad teaching. It is also my considered judgment that, although a number of commentaries, ancient, modern, and contemporary, exist on this Upaniṣad, a thorough phenomenological investigation of some fundamental issues is lacking. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to undertake such an investigation and shed light on mind, consciousness, and the *turīya*.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, no Western philosopher or psychologist had ever examined the state of deep sleep; if anything, the state of deep sleep had been ignored as unimportant and insignificant. To be sure, some Western psychologists, such as Freud and Jung, did concern themselves with the interpretation of dreams, but not with the *state* of dream itself; their inquiries into dreams are driven by psychological and therapeutic interests and considerations, whereas the inquiry of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad into the three possible modes of our being is guided by ontological concerns.

In the waking state, we are aware of external objects; that is, we have external perceptions. In the dream state, we are aware of internal objects; that is, we have internal perceptions. In the deep-sleep state, we are aware

Indian Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. XXVI No.2

April 1999

of neither external objects nor internal objects; that is, we have neither external nor internal perceptions. The point to be made here, then is that objects, whether external or internal, are perceived only when the mind is functioning. In other words, perception of objects is due to the working of the mind. This means that the state of deep sleep, where there is no perception of objects, external or internal, mind is not functioning. In a word, mind is quiescent. During the state of deep sleep, one does not know that one is in deep sleep. However, when one awakes and is asked whether he slept well, he answers affirmatively by saying, "Yes, I have had a restful and blissful sleep." The question now is: how does one know that one had deep sleep on waking up, if one does not know that one is in deep sleep during the state of deep sleep? It simply does not make sense to answer by saying that one *remembers* that one had a deep sleep; for remembering implies knowing at an earlier time, but one does not know during deep sleep that one is in deep sleep. Let it be emphasized here that a person's claim to have had deep sleep can be objectively determined through neurophysiological investigation, just as his claim to have had a dream. If all knowing is through the activity of the mind through mental operations, including remembering-- and the mind is quiescent during deep sleep, then one's claim to have had deep sleep becomes mysterious and inexplicable.

The only way to rationally answer this question is to grant that there is a knowing that does not involve any mental activity--mental operations--and the knower is consciousness itself; and there are many passages in the Upaniṣad where "consciousness" is used synonymously with "knower" and "knowledge." Let us here clarify the two senses in which consciousness is to be understood as knowledge: 1. consciousness is the ultimate necessary condition for any knowing, and 2. consciousness itself is knowledge. All knowing through the mind involves an *object*, the known; accordingly, knowing through mind necessarily involves the tripartite distinction of the knower, the known, and the activity of knowing; that is, this distinction is never absent and cannot be collapsed in any knowing through the mind. The upshot of these observations is that the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad recognizes and calls our attention to a knowing and hence knowledge which does not involve the mind--any mental operations. Here, the

tripartite distinction mentioned above is wholly absent. In a word, in this kind of knowing consciousness itself is the knower and whatever is known and the act of knowing cannot exist separately from consciousness. Thus, according to the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, one knows, through consciousness itself, on awaking that one has had a deep sleep. It is true that on waking up mental activity resumes. Once one knows, no matter how, mind will simply report. I am fully aware that many philosophers will dismiss as absurd the whole idea of knowing anything at all without mental operations. But let me give a clear example of knowing without involving any mental operations. Thus ask someone, say John, "are you conscious now?" John immediately reply by saying, "Yes, of course I am conscious. What do you mean by asking such an absurd question?" Let me clarify the situation here. Yes, there certainly are mental operations enabling John to hear the question, just as there certainly are to enable him to answer the question. But this is not the point; rather, the point is, what mental operations are involved in John's *arriving at* the answer? I submit that there are none. But if someone thinks that there are mental operations by performing which John arrived at his answer, I would like to see the list. Let me emphasize that this is not a matter to be decided by arbitrary decisions and fiat of definitions, but by phenomenological investigation. I suggest that the reader inquire into this matter and determine for himself how he would arrive at his answer if he were asked this question; and if he does perform some mental operations, he should give me a list of them. Let me assure him that there are absolutely no mental operations in arriving at the answer, "Yes, I am of course conscious." The reason for there being no mental operations in arriving at the answer to the above question is that here knowing and being are one and the same and the tripartite distinction is wholly absent. One *immediately* knows that one is conscious, not through some mental operations, such as inference. The point of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad can now be stated as follows : during the state of deep sleep, the mind is quiescent, that is there are no mental operations and hence there can be no knowing through the mind. Nevertheless, there is consciousness and it is through consciousness itself that the deep-sleep state is known; and on waking, mental activity resumes and the mind simply reports what is known, no matter how it is

known.

Someone might now object by saying that one's claim that one has had deep sleep is based on inference. The objection runs as follows: on waking up, one feels relaxed, and one attributes the state of relaxation to having had deep sleep. This objection, however, cannot stand scrutiny. A state of relaxation can be had through means other than deep sleep. The person was awake before deep sleep and is awake after deep sleep and when he says he has had a deep sleep he means that he was not aware of any objects in between; and this claim he could not have made if he did not in some sense know he has had a deep sleep. He could just as well have said that someone injected into him a substance which induces relaxation. Someone might now object by saying that the person just got up from sleep and no wonder he says he has had deep sleep. But this objection begs the question, for the person did not say he has had sleep but a *deep* sleep. There is no difficulty with a person's saying on getting up that he has had a sleep, but it is quite a different matter when he says he has had a *deep* sleep. How did he know he has had a deep sleep? Appeals to feeling relaxed are of no avail, for as pointed above a state of relaxation can be had through means other than deep sleep. The inescapable conclusion, according to the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, is that in some sense there is knowledge of being aware of no objects at all. It might be mentioned in passing that the EEG's of different persons in the waking state are similar, those of dreaming are similar, and those of deep sleep are similar. The import of this remark is that we do not have to take on faith a person's report that he dreamt or has had deep sleep; rather, such reports are open to objective confirmation or disconfirmation.

Another important phenomenological observation here is that when we ask someone whether he slept well, he does not begin his reply by saying, "now, well, let me see..." Rather, he immediately says that he had trouble sleeping, had to turn and toss in the bed for long, had bad dreams, or has a deep sleep. This observation confirms the claim that one knows without any inference that one has had a deep sleep.

If the state of deep sleep were one wholly devoid of consciousness,

then there could be no continuity between going to sleep and waking up, and consequently the person could not draw any inferences. This is to say that the possibility for drawing inferences presupposes continuity of being; and, according to the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, it is consciousness that provides the continuity. And given that the mind is quiescent during deep sleep, it is through consciousness itself (which persists even in deep sleep) that one knows directly, immediately (without having to draw any inferences) that one has had deep sleep. In short, the knower here is none other than consciousness itself.

The important question that now arises is: what happened to the mind during the deep-sleep state? The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad answers this question as follows: To say that the mind is quiescent during deep sleep is not to say that the mind simply vanished away and became non-existent; rather, it is to say that the mind is no longer manifest as an individual entity, but became one with consciousness. It is precisely for this reason that there are no perceptions--objects--at all during deep sleep. In other words, during deep sleep mind merges with consciousness, losing everything characteristic of it as an individual entity. However, on waking up, the mind re-emerges from consciousness, manifesting itself as an individual entity with all its specific characteristics such as thoughts, feelings, memories, etc. The point here, then, is that the knowledge that one has had deep sleep is present in consciousness and it is recovered by the mind as soon as one wakes up. If the knowledge were not present, the mind could not recover it. It is clear from these observations that the mind is none other than consciousness with objects--intentionalities. Whatever is known through the mind, is always an intentionality, an object. In the state of deep sleep, there is no mental activity and consequently there are no intentionalities. The knowledge that one has had a deep sleep is therefore non-intentional knowledge, the knower here being non-intentional, objectless consciousness itself. It is clear, then, that according to the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, there is non-intentional, objectless consciousness, which is also a knower. All non-intentional knowing, such as one's knowing that one is conscious, is knowing by non-intentional consciousness, not knowing by mind, which is intentional consciousness.

From the above considerations, it is clear that the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad draws a *phenomenological* distinction between mind and consciousness. Mind is *phenomenologically* distinguished from consciousness as intentional knower--that is, whatever is known through the mind is always, unexceptionably, an object, an intentionally. And whatever is known non-intentionally is not an object, and it is known through non-intentional, objectless consciousness. However, mind is not *ontologically* different from consciousness; in fact, it *cannot* be different from consciousness, for consciousness--Ātman-- is the ultimate, non-dual reality; that is, nothing other than the non-dual reality can exist. Whatever exists is a manifestation (appearances) of consciousness, and mind is but one of the manifestations of the ultimate non-dual reality. Manifestations can disappear and reappear but consciousness--ultimate reality--whose manifestations are all appearances, itself never disappears. It is this consciousness that persists through all the three modes of our being, namely, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. It is also the non-intentional knower and makes possible intentional knowing through mind.

At this juncture, I wish to make some pertinent observations on the treatment of the topic of consciousness in the Western tradition. In this tradition, the terms "mind," "self," "I," and "consciousness" are used synonymously. Thus consider Descartes. He asks, "what then is it that I am?" and answers by saying, "A thinking thing... and if I entirely cease to think, thereupon I shall altogether cease to exist" (*Meditation II*). It is clear from this quote that Descartes does not phenomenologically distinguish mind and consciousness. I can easily imagine an Upaniṣadic rishi asking Descartes, "your teaching is interesting; however, I wish to ask as to how you *know* you cease to exist if you cease to think." The rishi will then offer deep sleep as an example of a state in which one certainly exists, although there is no thinking. This is the basis on which the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad phenomenologically distinguishes mind and consciousness. In deep sleep, there is just consciousness and absolutely no thinking; whereas in the waking and dream states there is consciousness with thinking, which is none other than mind; these correspond to non-intentional knowing and

intentional knowing, respectively. Thus from the ontological standpoint, the Western use of "mind" and "consciousness" synonymously is not wrong; on the contrary, it is in full accord with the teaching of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. But failing to phenomenologically distinguish mind and consciousness has led the Western tradition into denying non-intentional consciousness--objectless consciousness. In sharp contrast, the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, having phenomenologically distinguished mind and consciousness, consistently and correctly affirms non-intentional consciousness--Ātman. It is not surprising, then, that the Upaniṣadic tradition also developed various phenomenological techniques--Yogic disciplines--in order to realize non-intentional consciousness as the ultimate nondual reality. An observation concerning Western phenomenology: Husserl and all his followers regard consciousness as intentional; but from our discussion of the state of deep sleep, it should be clear by now that it is mind and not consciousness that is intentional. It is mind that pays attention to objects and therefore is intentional. Consciousness makes possible paying attention and having intentionalities--objects.

I come now to a discussion of *turīya*. "*turīya*" literally means the fourth. It is worth noting that the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad does not refer to *turīya* as a state, but merely as the fourth, beyond the state of deep sleep. The reason for this is that "state" connotes duality, in particular the distinction between the knower and the known *turīya*, according to the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, is the highest mode of being, beyond all dualities. But, unfortunately, commentaries on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad do not offer any phenomenological clarification of *turīya*; instead, they merely describe the *turīya* in vague terms and phrases, such as "realization of Brahman," "realization of Ātman," "realization of the ultimate non-dual reality," etc. I propose to offer here a phenomenological interpretation of *turīya*. From the phenomenological point of view, *turīya* is just like the state of deep sleep, except for one important difference: the difference is that whereas during deep sleep one does not know one is in deep sleep, in *turīya* one *does* know that one *is* in deep sleep. I shall now proceed to discuss the most significant implications of this interpretation.

In *turiya*, just as in deep sleep, there are no perceptions--objects; and one knows that one is in deep sleep; that is, one is aware that there are no objects at all. This means that one is aware of one's being even when there are no objects at all. This is the mode of highest wakefulness. Why is it the mode of highest wakefulness? Because "I am" persists even when there are no objects. This in turn means that there is a reality about each of us--the same reality, non-dual consciousness--whose existence is not contingent upon any objects. Such reality is indeed the necessary being--the reality that exists without depending for its existence upon anything other than itself. A word of caution here: In the phrase "I am" above, "I" is not to be understood as the ego, which is an object. The phrase is to be correctly understood as just consciousness (awareness)--Ātman, Brahman, the ultimate non-dual reality. Even if the entire world--all manifestations--disappears, there is a reality that never disappears and reappears. That reality is at once Ātman (objectless consciousness) and Brahman (Sat, Existence); realization of this reality is the highest philosophical and religious goal the sages exhort us to attain. He who attains this realization is the most wakeful one and the realization is the discovery that one is immortal. Immortality is not something we need to acquire but rather the attainment of *turiya* is the *discovery* that we have always been immortal. In short, it is an epistemological discovery, not acquiring something we did not have before. Having discovered that in one's true being one is immortal, not subject to birth and death, one is forever free of pain and suffering and lives in peace and joy. It is to be emphasized here that in the teaching of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad there is no transcendental hocus, pocus such as God, the Devil, Judgement, heaven, hell, etc. The Upaniṣad is concerned with discovering, through thorough going phenomenological inquiry, one's true being as non-intentional consciousness. And since consciousness persists through all of our modes of being, there is a sense in which we are always in *turiya*.

Before bringing this paper to a close, I wish to make some pertinent observations in regard to Berkeley. Remember Berkeley's question? Does the world continue to exist when I am not perceiving it? Berkeley had to bring in God to assure him that the world continues to exist because God always perceives it. The rishis will have nothing to do with God, and they

would have answered Berkeley's question as follows: The world does not disappear when you are not perceiving it; it continues to exist and does not vanish away, because it *is* Brahman, *Sat*; and *Sat* can never become *Asat*, and *vice versa*. It merges into and becomes one with your true being, Ātman, the non-dual reality (Brahman and Ātman are non-different).

But, interestingly enough, Berkeley did not ask whether he continues to exist when the entire world disappears. He would most probably have said that he too disappears when the whole world disappears. Such is not the case with the Upaniṣadic rishis. They will tell Berkeley that his inquiry is defective, for he does not undertake a systematic *phenomenological* investigation and analysis of the waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep states; had he done such an inquiry, Berkeley would have discovered that he does not disappear and become non-existent even when the entire world disappears. The state of deep sleep is thus an opportunity, provided us all by Nature, referred to as "Shakti," to enable us to answer the question as to what happens to the world and to oneself, when the whole world of phenomena disappears.

To conclude, 1. The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad is unique in its phenomenological investigation of our possible modes of being, in order to discover the reality that persists through all of them. 2. There is a knowing independently of any mental activity (mental operations); it is through consciousness itself that one knows directly and immediately on waking that one has had a deep sleep, not through any mental activities such as remembering and inferring. 3. This kind of knowing is non-intentional knowing, for it is not knowing any objects (phenomena) but rather knowing one's own mode of being. 4. The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad *phenomenologically* distinguishes mind and consciousness and shows on clear phenomenological grounds that *ontologically* mind is non-different from Ātman, the non-intentional consciousness; the reason for this ontological claim is that the non-intentional consciousness is indeed the ultimate non-dual reality; it is ultimate because even when all objects disappear it continues to be; objects appear, disappear, and reappear, whereas the non-intentional consciousness *never* disappears; it is non-dual in two senses:

a). it is impartite and b). nothing other than it can exist; whatever exists is this reality. It is for this reason that Ātman, the non-intentional consciousness, is also non-different from Brahman (*Sat, Existence*). 5. During deep sleep mind loses its individuality by merging--becoming one--with the non-intentional and therefore non-dual consciousness. Whatever consciousness knows in the state of deep sleep is simply reported by the mind on waking up, without having to perform any operations. That is, once something is known, no matter how, the mind also knows. 6. It is clear from this analysis that mind is none other than *intentional* consciousness, and whatever is known by the nonintentional consciousness is directly and immediately accessible to the mind. 7. By failing to *phenomenologically* distinguish mind and consciousness, the Western tradition denies non-intentional consciousness; in keen contrast, through its analysis of the state of deep sleep, the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad affirms non-intentional consciousness. 8. *Turiya* is just like deep sleep, except for one most significant difference; the difference is that whereas during deep sleep one does not know that one is in deep sleep, in *turiya* one *does* know during deep sleep that one *is* in deep sleep; thus *turiya* is the mode of highest wakefulness; it is the mode of highest wakefulness, because one is fully aware of one's being even when the entire world has disappeared. 9. The attainment of *turiya* is the realization of one's true being as the ultimate non-dual reality (non-dual consciousness) which never disappears. 10. The realization of *turiya* is thus the discovery that one has always been immortal (attaining immortality is not acquiring something one did not have before, but rather discovering that one has always been immortal). 11. Thus the attainment of *turiya* and therewith immortality is an *epistemological* event; consequently, *turiya* is not a postmortem state to be looked forward to after death; instead, it is knowledge that is to be realized here and now, while fully embodied. 12. In the Upaniṣad tradition, the attainment of *turiya* is the highest philosophical and religious goal; for this reason, the Upaniṣadic sages exhort us to earnestly strive after it. 13. Each person has to achieve *turiya* by himself or herself, and not expect others to achieve it for him or her (just as everyone has to take his or her own bath). 14. The realization of *turiya* leads one to fearlessness, wisdom, freedom, peace, and joy. 15. The teaching of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad is grounded in thor-

ough and sound phenomenological inquiry, and is wholly free of any and all theological baggage and claptrap.

NOTES

1. Swami tr., *Brahma-Sutra Bhāṣya of Śankārācārya*, Third Ed., Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1977.
2. Swami tr., *Eight Upanishads, with the Commentary of Śankārācārya*, Vol.I, and *Eight Upanishads, with the Commentary of Sankārācārya*, Vol. II, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1982.
3. Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Jñāna-Yoga (The Way of Knowledge) : An Analytical Interpretation*, Second Ed., D.K.Printworld, New Delhi, 1997.
4. Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Reality and Mysticism: Perspectives in the Upanisads*, D.K.Printworld (in association with Utkal University), New Delhi, 1997.

A note of jīva: We have stated that Ātman, the ultimate non-dual reality, is not to be confused with the jīva, which is through and through phenomenal. What, then, is the status of the jīva? The jīva is an appearance of Ātman, just as the world is an appearance of Brahman. Let us clarify this point by an analogy: Imagine an actor who plays different roles in different theatrical performances; thus, one day he appears on the stage as Napoleon, another day as Alexander, still another day as Julius Caesar, and so on. But no matter how many times one sees the performances, one does not know the actor himself, for one only sees the *appearances* of the actor and not the actor as he is in himself (apart from his appearances). The jīva is like the Napoleon, the Alexander, and the Caesar one sees on the stage. But it is clear that these appearances have no being independently of the actor; that is, from the ontological standpoint, the appearances have no existence apart from that of the actor. In a similar manner, the jīva (empirical ego), has no being apart from Ātman; and it would be a profound error to think otherwise; for nothing other than Ātman the ultimate non-dual reality, can be: Ātman (Brahman) is that without a second.

INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATIONS

- Daya Krishna and A. M. Ghose (eds) **Contemporary Philosophical Problems : Some Classical Indian Perspectives**, Rs. 10/-
- S.V. Bokil (Tran) **Elements of Metaphysics Within the Reach of Everyone**
Rs. 25/-
- A.P. Rao, **Three Lecturers on John Rawls**, Rs. 10/-
- Ramchandra Gandhi (ed) **Language, Tradition and Modern Civilization**,
Rs. 50/-
- S. S. Barlingay, **Beliefs, Reasons and Reflection**, Rs. 70/-
- Daya Krishna, A.M. Ghose and P.K. Srivastav (eds) **The Philosophy of
Kalidas Bhattacharyya**, Rs. 60/-
- M.P. Marathe, Meena A. Kelkar and P. P. Gokhale (eds) **Studies In Jainism**,
Rs. 50/-
- R. Sundara Rajan, **Innovative Competence and Social Change**, Rs. 25/-
- S.S. Barlingay (ed), **A. Critical Survey of Completed Reserach Work in
Philosophy in Indian University (upto 1980), Part I**, Rs. 50/-
- R. K. Gupta, **Exercises in Conceptual Understanding**, Rs. 25/-
- Vidyut Aklujkar, **Primacy of Linguistic Units**. Rs. 30/-
- Rajendra Prasad, **Regularity, Normativity & Rules of Language** Rs.100/-

Contact : The Editor,
Indian Philosophical Quarterly,
Department of Philosophy,
University of Poona,
Pune 411 007.