

## **The Sleep of the Awakened**

*A Beginner's Introduction to the Mandukya Upanishad*

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As a child I remember I was ordered by mother not to go to bed without the name of God upon my lips. Without asking for the reason why, I would obediently mutter the 'nAma' of "mAdhava" thrice and turn off to sleep. Similarly, immediately on waking up I was told I should almost bellow out the 'nAma' of "hari" seven times before starting the day. ("It does not matter if others around you too are startled awake... That's part of the purpose, anyway!" mother would chuckle!) The habit grew on me over the years, thanks largely to my dear departed mother.

It was not until many years later that I learnt the practice of uttering the 'nAma' of God, before and after a night of sleep, has its origins in ancient scriptures. AndAl in the "tiruppAvai", for instance, sings:

*"uLLatthu kondu munivargaLum yOgigaLum mELLa-ezhundhu  
ari-yenra pEraravam, uLLam pugundhu kuLirndh-elOr empaavaay!"* (stanza 6)

"Yogis and 'muni-s' awaken with the blessed name of Hari upon their lips and minds..."

Sleep is a deeply mystical, sacred experience. We all sleep. Hence we are all mystics... and to utter the name of God before and after going to sleep is a good way to remind ourselves of the fact.

### **"Mother of Fresh Thought"**

We work hard all day, go about the hectic business of our daily life, and expend precious life energy on a hundred things and activities through the restless waking hour. When night falls, however, we quietly but instantly wind down. No matter how grave or pressing the burden of cares weighing upon its mind, when night falls, the world downs shutters, drops everything and simply goes to sleep... even if it is only to "sleep over the matter".

Some people in the world have great difficulty going to sleep -- insomniacs, neurotics, and sleepwalkers. Those with "sleeping-disorders" are really very ill people. Incapacity for sleep and insufficiency of sleep are the chief causes of much ill health and unhappiness in the world. If the world slept well there would perhaps be fewer wars and less marital discord in it... Who can tell? It is said a large part of the global profits that big multinational pharmaceutical companies make is derived from... guess what? Sale of drugs and medications meant to make people sleep like normal human beings!

There are as many people in the world who suffer from excess of sleep as those who either lack it or have too little of it. The character Kumbhakarna in the epic *Ramayana* is an extreme example of such men. Such men (and women too) just love to sleep. You call them in the morning you are told "Sorry, he's still in bed". You call again midday and the answer is "He's having his afternoon siesta". You call in the evening, "Sorry, he retired to bed early tonight"! Then there are ladies too who believe long sleep enhances their beauty and adds lustre to their looks! All such men and women actually suffer from a chronic "sleeping-disorder" or syndrome which the Bhagavath-gita (Ch.18 Stanza 39) calls "*tAmasa-nidra*" (the sleep of the

slothful). The afflicted ones get very special mention from Lord Krishna. He calls them by a bewitching name -- "*mohAna~mAtmA*". It is a name that with a single syllable wrongly stressed might easily be confused with another Sanskrit word, "*mOhana~mAtmA*", meaning "beautiful soul"! If we take care not to fall into the trap of Krishna's naughty wordplay, we will understand that "*mohAnamAtma*" refers to soporific souls ("*AtmA*") condemned to remain slumbering in the seductive embrace of Ignorance ("*mohA*"):

*yadagrE chAnubandhe cha sUkham mohAnamAtmAnah: I*  
*nidrAlasya pramAdOttham tat-tAmasam-udhAhritam II (XVIII.39)*

People who suffer from such "*tAmasa nidra*" are clearly headed towards spiritual delusion and degradation, not enlightenment, warns Sri.Ramanuja in his 'Gita-bhAshya': "*nidrAyA mOha-hEtutvam spashtam*".

Then there is another type in the world that neither sleeps too much or too little but just well. They are said to enjoy the sound and 'soulful sleep of the carefree'. (In my experience, they also attract good-natured envy wherever they go. Travelling on Indian Railways, in an unreserved third-class chair-car, I always envy the blessed few amongst my travel-mates who can sleep soundly, blissfully snoring too, amidst all the din and bustle of the rattling train!). These good souls wake up from bed and begin to immediately shine like the morning sun. They are vibrant, cheerful, very sweet tempered; and they remain pink with health all their lives. One of many reasons why I think little babies... the ones we might see cuddled up in cozy cribs or mother's arms... one of the reasons why I think the babies of the world, without exception, are all so angelic in disposition is that they sleep so very well!

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Genuine mystics ... the ones AndAl calls "*munivargaLum, yOgigaLum*"... they are another sort of angels that sleep really well. They sleep the sleep of the awakened.

The mystic often goes into deeply meditative states when it appears to us as though he has drifted off to sleep. The Sanskrit word for such a state too is "*nidra*" -- literally, sleep. But since this deep meditative state is the special sleep of great yogis (such as NammAzhwAr or NATHamuni, for instance), and not the pathological slumber ("*tAmasa nidra*") of "disordered" mortals, their "*nidra*" is differentiated as "*yOga-nidra*". When mystics emerge from '*nidra-yOga*' they radiate grace... like morning sun rays bouncing about splendidly inside misty woods of a dark rain forest. Indeed, so fresh do mystics look, so magnetic and so full of ineffable beatitude.

(They say the '*paramAchArya*' of Kanchi Mutt, '*pujyasri*' Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, often went into '*yOga-nidra*' only to emerge shining. In my personal experience, the same could be said too of the great "*narasimha upAsaka*", '*vaikuntavAsi*' U.Ve.Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar. He frequently would slip into "*yOga-nidra*" in the course of the many '*mahA-yagnyA-s*' he performed. When he re-emerged he certainly looked more radiant).

The sleep of good, ordinary mortals -- the '*nidra*' lasting just the right length of time, say, 5 to 6 hours a day -- though not of the same nature as the sleep of the yogis, is nonetheless very invigorating. We go to sleep every night as extremely tired men, exhausted by all the strife and stress of the world; but when we wake up in the morning we arise as different persons altogether, isn't it? We feel a new energy surging through our limbs and new light dancing in our eyes! Like lesser mystics perhaps, but mystics all the same, we too arise... make no mistake about it... we too arise from the experience of deep sleep exactly as yogis do from their own '*nidra*' -- we wake up strengthened, uplifted and revitalized! The famous English poet William Wordsworth, in his poem "To Sleep", describes exactly this kind of deeply nourishing Sleep in lines that are memorable indeed:

"... last night, and two nights more, I lay,  
 And could not win thee, Sleep! by any stealth:  
 So do not let me wear tonight away:  
 Without Thee what is all the morning's wealth?  
 Come blessed barrier between day and day,  
 Dear mother of fresh thoughts and joyous health!"

(W. Wordsworth "To Sleep")

Sleep, beloved Mother Sleep whom we beseech to take us into her embrace each night, she turns even plain men like us into mystics all...

### Why do we sleep?

There are times when a rare awareness about Sleep suddenly dawns on us; and when it does we seem convinced:

- Sleep is indeed a fascinating and complex experience, and more than a mere biological act we are programmed to carry out as daily, mechanical routine;
- Sleep is not just a "physiological response" of our body which medical science might explain away as nothing but a "nature call";
- Sleep is such a wondrous, near-mystic experience it moves even poets to reflect upon it -- as Wordsworth did calling it "blessed barrier between day and day"...

When such awareness dawns, it then occurs to us to ask some deeply philosophical questions:

(1) Why do we sleep? What happens to us during sleep?

(2) What is it really that we experience in sleep which enables us to awaken fully re-energized?

(3) What is this mysterious state of sleep we all pass through every night almost half our lifetimes ("*...pAdhi-yUmm urangipOgum ninradir padhinai-Andu..*", said saint Tondaradipodi referring to slumbering humanity)... and yet seem to know almost nothing about its real nature or cause?

(4) Why should the source of so much of our vitality and wellbeing be Sleep? If sleep is a reservoir of energy to be used daily in "re-charging" ourselves, wherefrom does the reservoir itself draw its kinetic supply?

(5) Might there perhaps be another state-of-being beyond Sleep somewhere? Someplace where one might discover Sleep's own fountainhead: a primal well-spring of mysterious life-energy from which much more could possibly be drawn than what we know we now do, in fits and starts, through our daily ration of 5-6 hours sleep?

(6) Where might Sleep's own power-source lie? Is it possible to directly tap into that original powerhouse, if there should be one?

It is these and other profound questions that get aroused in our minds when we read the great Upanishad called ...the "*mAndUkya*".

## The Mandukya Upanishad

The "*mAndukya*" is the pithiest of ten principal Upanishads which in our Vedantic tradition are collectively known as "*dasOpanishad*". It belongs to the Atharvana Veda. It contains only 12 brief "*mantrA*-s". Scholars both past and present have regarded this Upanishad to be brilliant but the most inscrutable. Nonetheless, all the great Vedantic '*achAryA*-s', from VyAsa and Gaudapada to Adi Shankara, RamanujAchArya and Ranga-ramanuja-muni, have all alluded, either directly or indirectly, to this Upanishad in their respective commentaries. Shankara, it is said, once declared that if a person could only study a single Upanishad in a lifetime it should be this one. In another less known, minor Upanishad called "*Muktika*" (Deliverance), there is an account, it is said, of Rama appearing before a devotee and saying "the Mandukya alone is sufficient for the deliverance of the spiritual aspirant", though less eager devotees will have to read the '*dasOpanishad*', or thirty-two or even all one hundred and eight. "In its succinctness the Mandukya distills essentials of mystical insight", wrote a contemporary scholar, Sri Eknath Eswaran.

No Upanishad study is recommended without the guidance and supervision of a personal and qualified teacher. The Mandukya is no exception. The Mandukya's terse description of the experience of Sleep as "*sUshUpta-sthAna*" (literally, a "place of Sleep") and as "*truteeyah: pAdah:*" (the third state of human experience) is extremely difficult to comprehend in layman terms. Only a Vedantic guru can illumine a student on the truth of the Mandukya passages. However, even in the absence of a proper teacher, and even when left to his own means, a serious student placing his trust in God and doggedly pursuing the Upanishad, can still expect to grasp at least the outlines of the central theme of the sacred text, if he diligently and wholeheartedly applies his mind to the task. The task begins, firstly, in being able to imagine Sleep to be a journey into the night Man undertakes --- a journey with three stops along the way...

Let us follow it.

### The 3 states of human experience

The Mandukya, at the outset, opens our eyes to the fundamental truth that to human beings there are only three natural planes of experience available viz. the Waking, the Dream and the Sleep states. (There are other states known to man perhaps, such as the drunken state or the drug-induced states of mind, but they can never be regarded as natural at all. It is for this reason why many of the findings in Aldous Huxley's famous book, "The Doors of Perception", about "mystic states" induced by the drug, mescaline or LSD, can only be regarded as spurious, even dangerous experimentation, and never genuine experience in the true Upanishadic sense).

### "vaishvAnara"

The Mandukya calls the Waking-state as '*jAgruti*'. This is the plane in which all of us experience this world through perception via the medium of each of our sensory faculties 'turned outward' (viz. sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, mind, intellect, intuition and ego). It is within this plane of '*jAgruti*' that we live and experience all the gross objects of the external world -- including thoughts, desires and passions arising out of them as well as the resulting feelings of joy and pain. The welter of all such gross sensory experiences is what the Upanishad calls "*vaishvAnara*". These experiences are common across all humanity; in other words, since everyone has the same set of sensory organs, everyone perceives objects in the same way; and, normally, objects too arouse the same experiences in everyone.

## "taijasa"

The second plane of experience is "*swapna*" -- the Dream-state into which we slip when we go to sleep. In this state all our sensory apparatus are 'turned inward'. They continue performing their respective functions of apperception but do so in an exclusively "introverted mode" i.e. none else other than the dreamer himself can experience his dream. No two persons can dream alike since the respective experience of it is uniquely his own.

Furthermore, in the '*swapna*' state, it is not the gross objects of the Waking world that is experienced but their subtle impressions or images as imprinted upon our subconscious. We do not carry with us into the dream-state all of the objects of our desire and hope, passion or fear as they exist in "*jAgruti*". Only a residual few -- the strongest and most intense of desires -- follow us into the "*swapna*" state and they manifest there either as (a) subtle, and often very strange image or (b) as oracular, sometimes even clairvoyant message. The anger of one's waking moments, for example, might manifest itself as a hideous viper in the dream-state. Similarly, repressed lust in the '*jAgruti*' state might unexpectedly surface as carnal dream-images. And sometimes our dreams foretell or in some vague way anticipate events yet to happen in the Waking world.

It is the state of such "*swapna*", the netherworld of suggestive dreams, which the Mandukya recognizes as reality and as an inalienable part of human personality and experience. The sum-total of such subtle experiences is called "*taijasa*". (What the Mandukya recognized long, long ago became, centuries later, in the hands of Dr.Sigmund Freud, the pioneering science of Psycho-pathology and Psycho-therapy: the theory and method of treating psychological disorders through clinical interpretation of dreams).

The experiences of both "*jAgruti*" and "*svapna*", although very different in character, substance and duration, have one thing in common -- Desire ("*kAmA*"). Our desires in the Waking-state are multitudinous and multifarious indeed. However, when we cross over in sleep from the Waking into the Dream state, we do not carry with us all of such longings and latent yearning. On the journey from "*jAgruti*" into "*taijasa*" we take with us as subliminal baggage only the most deeply rooted elements of our "*kAmA*" and with which we have identified ourselves so inseparably that it continues to cling to us like a shadow. We cannot, or rather we do not want to shake it off.

## "praj~nya"

The 3rd plane of human experience is what the Mandukya calls "*truteeyah: pAdah:*". (The word "*truteeya*" in Sanskrit means "Third" and "*pAda*" means, "part"). In the celebrated 5th and 6th stanzas, the Upanishad gives us great insight into the real and mystical nature of Sleep-experience which it calls "*praj~nya*".

The experience of "*praj~nya*" is not the same as ordinary "*nidra*" that we experience fitfully during daily sleep -- i.e. it is not our nocturnal shuttling, in and out, between "*jAgruti*" and "*svapna*". The Upanishad says "*praj~nya*" is experience of sheer unending 'Atmic' bliss readily available at a certain exclusive "spot" or "station" en route the journey of sleep. The "spot" is called "*sUshUpta-sthAna*" -- a virtual locus of mystical delight to be found beyond the first and second states of Waking and Dreaming.

In "*praj~nya*", unlike "*taijasa*" or "*vaishvAnara*", there is no trace of "*kAmA*". The residual but deep-seated desires of our Dream-state do not and cannot infiltrate into this blessed

region. Since there is no "kAma" here, there is no work left, and hence no use for, our sense organs which therefore withdraw and retract into the mind. The mind itself then lies absolutely still. The resultant state of experience is "Praj~nya", says the Upanishad. It is subtle mass of pure consciousness unconditioned by the senses. It is quite unlike any sensory experience and hence cannot be described in words. It is composed wholly of 'Atmic' bliss... "praj~nAnaGhana EvA-nandamaya..":

"yatra sUptO na kamchana kAmum kAmayatE  
na kamchana svapnam pashyati tat sUshUptam I  
"sUshUpta-sthAna Eki-bhUthah: praj~nAnaGhana EvA-nandamayO  
hyAnanda-bhUkchEthO-mukha: prAj~nyas~truteeyah: pAdah:" II

"The third state is called Praj~nya, of deep sleep  
In which one neither dreams nor desires.  
There is no mind in Praj~nya, there is no  
Separateness; but the sleeper is not  
Conscious of this. Let him become conscious  
In Praj~nya and it will open the door  
To the state of abiding joy." (translation: E.Easwaran "The Upanishads")

"Esha sarvEshwara Esha sarvagnya EshO'antaryAm-yEshu yOnih:  
sarvasya prabhAvApyayow hi bhUtAnAm II

"This one (i.e. the "sUshUpta-sthAna") is the Lord of All. This is omniscient, this is the inner controller of all; this is the cause of every other thing; this is the place of origin and the end of all beings".

(translation: N.S.Anantha Rangachar: "The Principal Upanishads")

## The Journey of "sUshupti"

When we go to sleep daily each night, little do we realize that we also embark upon an extraordinary journey that takes us away from the diverse world of "vaishvAnara" far across to the frontiers of our consciousness in "taijasa" and "praj~nya".

It is in the vast landscape of dreams that much of our journey of sleep is undertaken. Then for a very brief while, no more than a few fleeting minutes, the journey manages to leave behind the domain of "taijasa" and advances even further. It is then that, with tentative steps, we approach the gateway to the wonderland of "abiding joy" the Upanishad calls "praj~nya".

Conveyed thus to within sighting distance of the outskirts of the city of "praj~nya", both our body and spirit begin to experience the faint whiff of "Ananda" (sheer spiritual Bliss) wafting across to us from the "sUshUpta-stAna". It is the special moment during sleep when our breathing becomes deepest and sweetest. It is the moment when the precious life-energy within each of us, called "prANA", undergoes invigoration. The muscles of our sleeping body completely relax. (Medical science too confirms this). There are no dreams, pleasant or otherwise, to disturb or distract this brief but blessed state. In this near-"sUshUptic" state there is no sensation of anything -- neither objects of desire nor their impressions. There is not even sensation of our individuality... This is experience the Mandukya calls "Ananda", pure and serene... but then it is mere intimation, not the real experience of "praj~nya". And it is this mere intimation of "Ananda" that we should recognize constitutes the delight of a "good night's sleep". It is the source of our bodily wellbeing and the reason for our mental vitality. Like Wordsworth, we value it more precious than "all the morning's wealth".

Yet, ironically, what the Mandukya reveals to us is that the joy or vitality in a "good night's sleep" is but mere infinitesimal fraction of the full-blown experience of "*Anandamaya*" found in the inner-city of "*praj~nya*" where "*sarvEshwara*", the Almighty Himself, is said to reside in "*sUshUpti*"...

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Just at the moment when sleep is about to take us beyond the dream-state of "*taijasa*" and to the very doorsteps of blissful "*praj~nya*", we are suddenly turned back. We do a U-turn and head right back again into the uneasy and motley world of "*svapna*". And there we remain wandering and maundering for a few more hours until the morning... when we finally wake up to return to the harsh glare of common, sensory reality: what we may call the "*jAgrutic*" pell-mell of "*vaishvAnara*"...

Night after night, all through our lives, without yet being truly aware we are repeating and retracing the same steps of this Upanishadic shuttle-journey of "*sUshUpti*", we depart from the external world of "*vaishvAnara*", travel across the dreamland of "*swapna*" and approach the very doorsteps of the ultimate source ("*yOnih*") of Joy and Energy, "*praj~nya*". Alas, at the very last moment, we are turned back. We never really get to gain entry into that great city of "*sUshUpta-sthAna*". All that we manage to bring back with us every morning, as journey's poor reward for the effort, is only so much of a whiff of divine "*Ananda*" as will last us or linger with us, for a day or two at best... no more! Come nightfall, when we are worn out and exhausted once more by the external world (of "*vaishvAnara*"), we will embark again upon the same unconsummated trip to "*sUshUpti*" -- to forage for yet another day's petty ration of energy, to gather "fresh thoughts and joyous health"... In the Chandogya Upanishad, Man's inability to fully seize and realize the opportunity of "*sUshUpti*" is captured brilliantly in a single line (8-3-2):

"Like strangers in an unfamiliar country  
Walking over a hidden treasure day by day,  
We enter the world of Brahman while in deep Sleep  
But never find it, carried away by what is false."

The Mandukya's extraordinary account of "*sUshUpti*" provides us with this very valuable insight too:

Instead of stating that Sleep is a deeply mystical experience, it would be more accurate to say, rather, that every night of sleep in the life of Man is a night of missed opportunity for mystical fulfillment -- it lies virtually round the corner... and is yet so elusive...

### **The Weight of "kAma"**

The line of study of the Mandukya we have followed so far will not fail to raise some more questions in our mind:

- What is the reason for the opportunity of blessed "*sUshUpti*" being missed again and again in the daily journey of sleep? Even after going almost the full distance, why do we repeatedly fall short of our mark, the great "*praj~nya*"?
- Why are we ordinary souls unable to penetrate that third plane of human experiencing the Upanishad calls "*trutheeya-pAda*"? Why are we unable to commune with that state of "abiding joy" known to the Upanishad as "*praj~nyanaGhana'nanda*"? Why must we

remain content with mere crumbs of "Ananda" in sleep when there is a veritable ocean of bliss just beyond it?

- Why can't we too enjoy, in the manner of AndAI's yogis and 'muni-s', that deep and serene state of "sUshUpti" otherwise known as "yOga-nidra"?

The answer according to the Upanishad is simple:

If we grasp the reason why our passage from the Waking-state to the Dream-state is easy, it will help us see why exiting the Dream-state and penetrating into the borders of "sUshupti" is so very difficult. When we lie down to sleep at night, we must ask ourselves, what happens to us? We abandon and leave behind all frivolous desire and fears, all trifling thoughts and feelings of our Waking world, isn't it? What is this act of "abandoning"? It is really nothing but shedding of "vaishvAnaric" weight and excess baggage. We "give up", "renounce", "sacrifice", "surrender" or "let slip" as much of "kAma" as is necessary to wrench us out of the clutches of the Waking world. The voluntary "load-shedding" ("nyAsa", it is called in the parlance of VisishtAdvaita Vedanta) is what enables the stilling of the senses and enables our ascent to the second plane of "taijasa", the greater experience of subtle worlds.

In the state of "taijasa" however, we are unable to repeat the success of the first one. The clinging dead-weight of our deeper "kAma" is not so easily jettisoned ("... na kamchana kAmum kAmayatE..", are the words the Upanishad uses here suggestively). It is inability to "abandon", to leave behind his deepest Desire that firmly blocks Man's advance into "sUshUpti", turns him away from its doorsteps and seals him off from the bliss of pure "Ananda". This is the reason why in that long journey of sleep into the night, the city of "praj~nya" appears to Man to be so near and yet so far...

The Mandukya's vivid portrayal of all this is a passage (stanza 5) that is truly immortal:

"The third state is called Praj~nya, of deep sleep  
In which one neither dreams nor desires.  
.....but the sleeper is not  
Conscious of this.  
Let him become conscious  
In Praj~nya and it will open the door  
To the state of abiding joy."

## The Leap of the Frog

The word "mandUka" is Sanskrit for 'frog'; so 'Mandukya Upanishad' is "Frog Upanishad". No one really knows how this Upanishad got its rather odd name. Some say it was associated with the ancient Sage Varuna who had power to assume the form of creatures like even the frog; hence the name of "mAndukyOpanishad". Some Western scholars say that the Upanishad was for long preserved by the branch of an ancient family whose totem carried the tribal insignia of a frog; hence "mAndUkyOpanishad". This does not seem a credible explanation since ancient Vedic families were always known by the name of their "gOtra" (unbroken lineage) and no "gOtra" bearing the name of "mandUka gOtra" was ever known in India.

The most credible explanation why this Upanishad got its strange name is put forward by the pontiff of the Kanchi Sankara Mutt, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati in his book of discourses "Deivattin Kural". The frog is a creature that is known for its prowess of leaping. Some sub-specie of the frog family are known to cover up to 10-12 feet in a single leap and that is perhaps the inspiration behind the English coining the phrase "to leap-frog", meaning

'to vault over" or "bound over". This Upanishad describes how yogis and 'muni-s' similarly leapfrog like "*mandUka-s*" and vault themselves from the Waking and Dream states straight into the consciousness of the third state of blissful "*sUshUpti*". (The Upanishad text, in fact, says they catapult themselves into the fourth plane of "*tUriya*" -- the state even the Upanishad is unable to describe adequately: the absolute experience of Brahman in the transcendent abode ("*parama-pada*") of the Almighty. For the limited purpose of our study we stay with the third state of "*sUshUpti*" and proceed no further.)

Unlike ordinary mortals who have no choice but to plod along the long path from Waking to the Dream-state, and then trudge again from Dream-state to the state of "*sUshUpti*" without ever completing the journey, yogis and 'muni-s' are able to go straight from "*jAgruti*" to "*sUshUpti*" with minimal effort. By dint of spiritual prowess, gained partly by effort and partly by grace of God, yogis manage to pare down the multitude and complex of "*kAma*" in their lives to a single simple one: *attain Godhead*. Freed of desire, fear and selfishness, there is nothing to hold the yogi back in either "*vaishvAnara*" or "*taijasa*". As if possessed of a magic switch, he turns on and shuts off his sense-apparatus at will. When turned off, he soars into the pure consciousness of "*praj~nya*". There is no better affirmation of this 'Mandukyian' experience than the evidence available in the lives of such yogis. Their example is clear proof that the Mandukya is indeed a document of mystical verity, not fancy.

### The Mandukyian Exemplars

Several are the yogis and 'muni-s' in the land of India that one may want to cite as exemplars of the Mandukya experience. Personally, I regard three of them to be very appealing and convincing. Let me share only them here.

The first is Sri Parashara Bhattar (11<sup>th</sup> century AD) of SriRangam who was a disciple and protégé of Sri Ramanujacharya (10<sup>th</sup> century AD). Bhattar was the chief "*purOhit*" (priestly administrator) of the SriRangam temple; he was also SriVaishnava theologian and scholar. Although he was not generally given to outward expression of mystical fervor, an incident in Bhattar's life does lead us to infer his ability to easily traverse the mystical path of the Mandukya. Bhattar died young at the age of 32. He was diagnosed to be suffering from a malignant tumor that grew so painful that attending doctors of those days ventured to perform surgery on him. Knowing the procedure would be excruciatingly painful, they advised Bhattar to consume a crude concoction (probably a heavy sedative) that would serve as general anesthesia. Bhattar is reported to have replied: "I do not need anesthesia. Just let me recite the blessed verses of the "*tiruppAvai*" (of AndAL). You can then perform any surgery on me you want." To Bhattar, reciting the sacred verses of the "*tiruppAvai*" possessed power, far greater than any anesthesia, to take him into the deep regions of "*sUshUpti*" where no mortal pain could ever touch him.

The second instance is a similar one and it is an incident in the life of the sage of Tiruvannamalai, Sri Ramana Maharishi (19<sup>th</sup> century AD). In his advanced years, Ramana was afflicted with a virulent form of cancer that in an ordinary man would have caused unbearable pain and distress. Doctors wanted him to undergo surgery but the sage would have none of it. "The cancer is in my body," he said calmly, "The pain is the body's problem. I am not the body and the pain is not mine." (The event has even been reported with wonder in a published clinical dissertation of the world-renowned neurosurgeon from Madras, Dr.B.Ramamurthy.) Once again we see here a living example of a yogi shrugging off pain by remaining oblivious to all bodily (i.e. "*vaishvAnaric*") conditions. It is only deep absorption in the "*sUshUptic*" state that could have made it possible.

The third and rather dramatic instance of a yogi simply vaulting across the 3 states of experience is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (19<sup>th</sup> century AD). There is an account of how

his master Totapuri first taught Sri Ramakrishna to go into "*sUshUpti*" (or what in the Advaitic school is called "*nirvikalpa-samAdhi*") in the book "*The Message of the Upanishads*" by Swami Ranganathananda. It is a vivid illustration of a typically Mandukya journey in which a yogi simply "leap-frogs" from the plains of "*jAgruti*" to the very summit of "*praj~nya*":

"After instructing his disciple in the central ideas of path of Vedantic "*gnyAna*", Totapuri exhorted Sri Ramakrishna to fix his mind on the unconditioned Brahman (spoken about in the Upanishads). Ramakrishna himself narrates the event (in the book, "Life of Sri Ramakrishna"):

"After the initiation, the guru asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive into the Atman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not cross the realm of names and forms and bring my mind to that unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing the mind from all other objects (of the world) except one, the all too familiar form of the blissful Mother (Durga)... which appeared before me as a living reality, preventing me from passing beyond the realm of names and forms... In despair I said to the guru "It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman". (Totapuri) sharply said, "What? You can't do it? But you have to!" He cast his eyes around and finding a piece of glass he took it up and pressing the point between my eyebrows said, "Concentrate the mind on this point". With stern determination then I again sat down to meditate... There remained no more obstruction to my mind which at once soared... and I lost myself in 'samAdhi'."

Totapuri sat for a long time watching his disciple. Finding him still motionless, he left the hut, locking the door from outside lest anyone should intrude without his knowledge. He remained outside awaiting the disciple's call from within to open the door. The day passed, night came, a second and a third day and night also passed and still there was no call. Totapuri was astounded. He opened the door and entered the room. He was speechless with wonder to see Sri Ramakrishna seated in the very same position in which he had left him. The face was calm, serene and radiant. In breathless amazement he examined the disciple's heart and respiration and touched again and again the disciple's almost corpse-like body. There was no visible sign of consciousness. He cried in bewilderment at the miracle of this young man achieving in a single day this highest realization of "*nirvikalpa samadhi*" which had taken him 40 years of hard practice to realize.

"Totapuri immediately took steps to bring the mind of his disciple down to the world of phenomena. The little room rang with the holy mantra of "*praNava*" uttered in a solemn tone by the teacher. Little by little Sri Ramakrishna's mind came to an awareness of the outer world; and as he opened his eyes he saw his teacher looking at him with tenderness and admiration. The disciple reverently prostrated himself before the teacher who in turn locked him in a warm embrace".

### **The Sleep of the Awakened**

We go to sleep each night not only to rest our tired limbs and jaded mind. A study of the Mandukya -- and deep reflection upon its theme as exemplified by the lives of yogis -- enables us to understand that Sleep is not only bodily need but spiritual function too. "*sUshUpti*" is God's way of extending a standing invitation to us to drop in on Him, take a little tour of His realms and find out for ourselves about the "abiding bliss" the Upanishad declares prevails there. If Man chooses not to take up God on His invitation, it could only be due to sloth and ignorance -- "*nidrAlasya pramAdOttham tat-tAmasam-udhAhritam*" to recall the words of the Bhagavath-Gita above. It is only sloth or ignorance, or both, that can keep our spirit from advancing upon Heaven's gateways situated in the inner world of our

consciousness -- the world which our Waking-state, preoccupied as it is forever with what is mundane and desire-ridden, conspires to keep shut always.

Sleep is certainly not, on account of all this, the equivalent of God-experience; but it is perhaps the nearest approximation of it known to Man. It is within easy grasp, too, of one and all. The secret of "*sUshUpti*" lies in being able to '*awaken in sleep*' and look through the eyes of the Mandukya at what lies beyond. Sleep will then no longer seem slothful activity ("*tAmasa-nidra*"). Instead, every night we go to bed it will seem to us as if we are preparing to go into "*yOga-nidra*" where, like AndAl's "*munivargaLUm yOgigaLum*", we might seize the sacred opportunity for true meditative joy and lasting mystical fulfillment...

Who knows? It is probable we might then find it quite easy to cultivate the old custom of our wise forefathers: going to bed uttering "*Madhava, Madhava, Madhava!*" and awaking with "*Hari*" bellowing seven times upon our lips!

**\*\*\* CONCLUDED \*\*\***