

Mandukya Upanishad – Group Discussion & Bonding Questions:

Verse 1 — Plurality is Nothing But OM

1. Why does the cause (EG: cotton) of anything always seem less visible than the thing (eg: shirt) itself?
2. Why is knowing the one material cause of everything more freeing than knowing the details of every individual thing?
3. If past, present and future are all just OM rearranging - what does that do to your sense of urgency about what you're chasing?

Verse 2 — Brahman is Verily OM

1. Atma/Self is the only principle that doesn't need a means of knowledge to announce its presence. Explain.

Verse 3 — Waking State Consciousness

1. Why can't dream actions generate karma (consequences of actions) the same way waking actions do?
2. What does calling the instruments "mouths" reveal about our relationship to the world?
3. How does ahaṁkāra differ from the other eighteen instruments?
4. What causes error, if vṛtti (thought) is the basis of all knowledge?
5. Why is the "no-mind" state not the final goal of Vedānta?
6. How does the plant-and-earth metaphor illustrate the individual's relationship to the total?

Verse 4 – Dream State Consciousness:

1. Why can't the dreamer access the waking state even though dream content is borrowed from it?
2. What is Hiranyagarbha and how does it relate to your individual subtle body?
3. Why must you first appreciate yourself as an extension, before understanding you are the whole?
4. How does the seed example demonstrate that the subtle governs the physical?

Verse 5 — Deep Sleep Consciousness

1. How do we infer the existence of a causal body if it cannot be directly experienced as an object?
2. Why is deep sleep's happiness unlike any happiness gained in waking or dream?
3. Have you ever noticed a deep tendency, fear, or talent in yourself that you cannot trace to any experience in this lifetime - and what do you make of it?
4. Your causal body has been with you since beginningless time - so based on your current tendencies, what kind of trouble do you think your previous carriers got into? :-)

Verse 6 — The Causal Consciousness

1. If intelligence is present at every level of assemblage, why do we need a teaching to see it?
2. How is the dream analogy helpful in understanding Ishvara as both maker and material?
3. Why does the individual causal body have ignorance, while the total causal body (called Ishvara) does not?
4. When you pray to Ganesha or Saraswati, what are you actually acknowledging?

Verse 7 — Negation of Prior Three Quarters

1. Explain logically, why can't Atma be totally identified with any of the 3 states (waking, dream, sleep)?
2. Can you recall a time you tried to "reach" or "find" yourself - what happened?
3. How does the ice-and-water analogy help us understand "prapañca-upaśamam" (world is resolved)?
4. Why is Atma called Turiya (the fourth), if it is not actually a fourth state that comes and goes?

Gaudapada Karika

1.18:

1. What's one thing you were absolutely sure was true - that fell apart once you saw it differently?

Mandukya Upanishad:

Verse 8 — Symbolism of the Letters of “OM”

1. If every name ultimately points to Brahman, why do we still fight over names and categories in daily life?

2. How does the "humanity" vs. "Caucasian" analogy help explain why OM represents all names?

Verse 9 — “A” – The First Letter: Viśva / Vaiśvānara

1. Why does the Upanishad say that knowledge of reality can only take place in the waking state?
2. How does meditating on "A" as Vaiśvānara (total physical) change the way you relate to other people and objects in your waking world?

Verse 10 — “U” – The Second Letter: Taijasa / Hiranyagarbha

1. What does "becomes equal towards others" actually look like in daily interactions?
2. What is the practical purpose of meditating on "U" - what is it supposed to change in how you experience your own intelligence?

Verse 11 — “M” – The Third Letter: Prājña

1. What are some tendencies you notice reappearing fresh each morning after sleep?
2. If the world comes because of your presence and resolves back into you, how does that shift how you walk through your day?
3. If the purpose of "U" was to expand knowledge, what does "M" meditation add beyond that?

Verse 12 — “Amātra” – The Fourth Letter: Turīyaḥ

1. If Turīya is compared to the screen on which three movies play, why do we normally notice the movies but miss the screen?
2. The verse says Turīya is "not available for transaction". Have you ever tried to grasp or study your own awareness, and what happened?
3. After chanting OM and resting in silence, what do you actually find when you search for the one who witnesses that silence?

Gaudapada Karika

Kārikā 1.8 — Will, Time, and Nature

1. If scripture says "He desired to become many," how can Advaita still say Brahman has no desire or lack?

Kārikā 1.9 — Creation Is Not God's Need

1. How would you respond to someone who says this is all "God's play", a līlā?

Kārikā 2.4 — Objects are Perceived in Both States

1. Someone says: "Dream objects are inside my head, but waking objects are outside - so waking must be real." How would you counter that?

Kārikā 2.6 — The Unreality of the Waking State

1. **Fun ones:**
 - a. If your dream character could sue you for calling their world “unreal,” what evidence would they bring to court?
 - b. What is one thing you took very seriously five years ago that now makes you laugh?
 - c. Have you ever woken from a dream and felt disappointed that the dream food, money, or romance was not real?
2. Why does Gauḍapāda say that if something did not exist before it appeared, and will not exist after it disappears, it cannot be absolutely real even while it appears?

Kārikā 2.9 — Inner & Outer Consciousness Within Dream

1. In waking life, what is one object, situation, or relationship that feels very solid and real to you, even though you know it is changing?

Kārikā 2.13 — How Does Self “Imagine Itself”?

1. What is the difference between seeing the sun as merely a physical object and seeing it as a form of Īśvara?

2. If laws of nature, karma (consequences that come your way), and dharma are expressions of Īśvara - how should we respond when results do not go according to our plans?
3. How does knowing “I am satyam” help a person stop depending on changing things for security?
4. In your own life, what situation becomes easier to handle when you remember that the result belongs to the total order, not only to you?

Kārikā 2.17 — Rope-Snake Analogy for Projection

1. Can you share a time when you misunderstood yourself or someone else, and later realized your view was incomplete? What factors most contributed seeing it in its truer form?
2. When the rope is not seen clearly, why does the mind imagine it as a snake, and how does that relate to the way we misunderstand Self?

Kārikā 2.18 — Knowledge Removes the Error

1. What removes the imagined snake?
2. Why can action not remove the snake?
3. What “torchlight” helps you calm down and see things more clearly?

Kārikā 2.32 — The Benchmark of Non-duality

1. Can you recall a moment where others reacted to the surface appearance, but you remained composed because you saw what was underneath? (**EG:** what really happens after death, etc).
2. How does the gold-ornament example help us see the world without giving it absolute reality?

Kārikā 2.35 — The Realisation of Non-Duality

1. What helps you reduce the hold that people, outcomes, or objects have over you?
2. What does it mean that Awareness is not found in one special thought or experience?
3. What is one small thing that can still disturb your “inner sage” easily? How could you look at that thing to reduce its influence?

Kārikā 3.1 — Keeping the Intellect Open

1. What is relationship between *inquiry* (seeing things as they are), *devotion* (expressing what you know in real life), and *upasana* (various spiritual practices)?

Kārikā 3.3-4 — Pot-Space Smilie

1. How might your understanding of Self change if Self is like space?
2. What is cidābhāsa (reflected consciousness), and what is it’s teaching purpose?

Kārikā 3.5 — Jivas (Confinements) are Many, Atman is One

1. FUN:
 - a. If cup-space could talk, what complaint would it make?
 - b. If awareness had a passport, where could it travel?
2. What person or situation still pulls you into reaction mode - and it takes repeated reminders on your part, to see them also within Ishvara’s order?

Kārikā 3.7-12

1. What problem comes from thinking your awareness is “part” of Brahman?
2. Stomach-space the same as cosmic-space. What is significance of this statement?

Kārikā 3.16 — Catering for Three Stages of Understanding

1. What is one “wave story” you tell yourself that upāsanā (spiritual practice) can soften?
2. Looking back, how has your journey moved through missing it [hina], getting it then losing it [madhya], and holding it more steadily [utkrṣṭa]?

Kārikā 3.18-39 — Duality – An Effect of Non-Duality

1. Why can Advaita accept Dvaita, but Dvaita (eg: ISKCON) struggles to accept Advaita?
2. Why might “no second thing” feel scary at first?

Kārikā 3.44 — Role of Meditation

1. What's your favorite japa (repeated mantra), and why?

Kārikā 3.46 — A Final Checklist for Mind Management

1. What is the difference between the mind becoming a cup-thought and “becoming Brahman”?
2. Clarity is not perception changing, but conclusions about the perception changing. Explain and give examples.
3. When your mind is stormy, what helps you remember it doesn't define you?

Kārikā 3.48 — Nothing is Ever Born

1. How does the gold-ornament example challenge our idea of birth and death?
2. If no jīva is truly born, what exactly are you referring to when say, “my life”?

Kārikā 4.48 — The Firebrand

1. How does the firebrand metaphor show that behind many appearances there is one single consciousness?
2. When life feels crowded with problems, how can the firebrand example help you look deeper?

Kārikā 4.52 — World Doesn't Emerge from Consciousness

1. Justify/Explain: World doesn't emerge from Consciousness.

Kārikā 4.55-56 — Perpetuation of Causality

1. When does the world feel absolutely real to you?
2. Gaudapada even dismisses “Ishvara” (Cause / Creator). Explain.

Kārikā 4.62 — Non-duality & Projection of Multiplicity

1. Think of a dream you believed was real while in it - what made you so convinced, and what in waking gives you that same false certainty?
2. From inside the dream you are the creator - from outside it, you are not. Which standpoint is truer, and why?

Kārikā 4.76 — Liberation from Causality

1. If awareness has never truly become inferior, average, or superior - what are those labels actually describing?

Kārikā 4.78 — Liberation from the Three Afflictions

1. If no outside force can punish or diminish what you are, no being can judge you after the body falls — does that feel liberating, or does it feel unsettling?

Kārikā 4.81-83 — Different Schools

1. The Madhyamaka Buddhist says everything is empty of inherent existence — but if you negate everything, what have you forgotten to negate, and why does that matter?
2. The Kṣāṇika-vijñāna-vādi says consciousness is a series of momentary flickers — what observation from your experience challenges that claim?
3. The Cārvāka says consciousness is produced by neurons and ends at death — what is Vedānta's fundamental challenge to that position? (Don't use technical terms to counter, speak to an ordinary man)
4. Jainism says karma physically sticks to ātmā, like dust to cloth. And liberation is cleaning off all karma from atma. Counter this.

Kārikā 4.85-100 — Integrated Sage is Dispassionate

1. Attachment is like clutching a tree, wanting freedom but enjoying the grip — be honest, what's still your tree?
2. Non-duality is like ocean depth — most people collect shells on the shore. What brought YOU a little deeper?
3. What has shifted for YOU between the first class and today?

Congratulations! Wishing you health, happiness and harmony.