

## 22

**Akshara Brahman—  
The Universal God**

*Whom the Muslims call Allah,  
The Christians address as Jehovah,  
The Vaishnavites adore as Phullabjaksha  
(Lotus-eyed Vishnu),  
The Saivites worship as Sambhu,  
Whom people at all time regard with  
devotion,  
He who bestows wealth and prosperity on  
all  
He is our Saviour!  
Know that He is the one and only  
Paramatma.*

**Embodiments of love!**

**P**eople give various forms and names to God according to the type of devotion they

practise. In modern times, however, a universal concept of God acceptable to all religious traditions is necessary. The monistic concept of Divinity expounded to Arjuna by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* harmonises the teachings of all religions and reconciles all traditions.

*Akshara* means a letter. But etymologically, *akshara* means something that is imperishable. *Akshara* is the Form; *Aumkara*, its Name, and spirituality, its, content. It is a universally acceptable Form of Truth. Its *swabhava* or intrinsic nature is not the interaction of the *trigunas*, or the three primordial attributes, but is *Divya Prakruthi* or Divine Nature from which emanates the entire universe. This monistic divine *Atma* manifests multiplicity in the world and this is the *Gita* concept of God. The monistic *Atma* undergoes no change; it neither increases nor decreases. That is why it has been designated as *akshara* or the imperishable. It is an undecaying integral reality.

Unity is the primal number. "One" contains all other numbers and all numbers can be derived from "one." We have to recognise the inner significance of this fact. All other numbers are not different from "one". They are only forms of "one". For example, "four" contains four ones or  $1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 4$ . If you add 1 to 4, you get 5. In such arithmetical processes, numbers either increase or decrease in their value. But number "1" remains an integral number without any change or modification.

While the phenomenal world is subject to change and decay, the divine Reality is indestructible. *Akshara* symbolises the indestructible divine Reality. All religious traditions proclaim that God the manifestation of *akshara* is eternal and people of all faiths accept this idea. The so-called theological differences are not really fundamental. *Aum* is the primordial *akshara* and all the other letters are its derivatives. The divine letter *Aum* represents the *Parabrahman*. The comprehension of the essence of the *Parabrahman* is known as *Brahma Vidya* or the knowledge of *Brahman*. That is why the eighth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* has been given the title of *Akshara Parabrahma Yoga*.

Secular knowledge is no doubt necessary for getting on in life. The Bliss of spirituality cannot be achieved without the minimal necessities of life. But secular knowledge is not the be-all and end-all of human existence. Spiritual knowledge is, as a matter of fact, more important than material knowledge. All branches of human knowledge are like rivers and spirituality is like the unfathomable and uncharted ocean. Just as the rivers flow into the sea and merge in it, all secular knowledge fulfils itself in spiritual knowledge.

The primordial nature of *akshara* transcends all attributes. It is *nirguna* or devoid of all attributes, and it is *niranjana* or devoid of attachment. Every *akshara* or letter in *Bhagavad Gita* proclaims the transcendental and immanent reality of the *Paramatma*.

“O, Ignorant fool! Chant the name Govinda. Your knowledge of grammar will not help you in the hour of death,” said the great philosopher-saint Sankara. All our encyclopaedic knowledge and profound scholarship cannot rescue us from the certainty of life and death.

There was once a very learned *pundit* who had mastered all the *Vedas* and the *Sastras*. He set out one day for a neighbouring village. On the way, he had to board a boat to cross a river. To pass the time, he began asking the boatman some questions. “Can you tell the time by looking at a watch?” was the first query. The simple boatman replied that he could not. At this, the arrogant *pundit* laughed derisively and told the poor man that a quarter of the latter’s life was as good as wasted in the river.

The next enquiry was whether the boatman could read a newspaper. When the boatman confessed his illiteracy, the proud *pundit* mockingly told him that half of his life was lost in the river. The scholar then asked the boatman if he could sing a song. Upon giving the answer in the negative for the third time, the simple boatman was derogatorily told that three-fourths of his precious life was sunk in the river, as it were. After some time, the sky was overcast with dark clouds and a terrific wind began to blow. A fierce storm having broken out, the boat was being tossed hither and thither by the swirling waters of the river. The boatman then asked the proud *pundit*, “Sir, can you swim? If you can’t,

the whole of your life has been wasted.” The hapless *pundit* could not swim. All his pedantry and scholarship failed to come to his rescue at this hour of need and he was swept away by the current. The unlettered boatman who could swim like a fish crossed the river and reached the other bank safely.

*Samsara Sagara* is the ocean of life. For crossing the ocean of life safely, a person should develop faith in *Paramatma*. Spiritual awareness alone will enable us to swim across the perilous ocean of life.

A person may follow any religion he likes or join any sect he likes. But all people, consciously or unconsciously, chant *Aumkara*. There may be denominational differences and the modes of worship may change. Each religion has its own set of dogmas. Muslims may not approve of the Hindu mode of worship. Similarly, Christians may condemn the Muslim mode of worship. But those are only superficial differences. *Akshara* or the divine letter that represents the imperishable substance of the divine monistic Reality is indisputable. It is the immutable and indestructible reality of Divine Omnipresence.

The division of the *Bhagavad Gita* into various chapters is only meant to suit our convenience. The entire text has an inseparable and indivisible organic unity. All the chapters are interdependent. The human body consists of various limbs and organs but they cannot, however, have an independent and isolated

existence. In the same way, the Omnipresent Divine Reality of the *Paramatma* constitutes the central theme of all the chapters of the *Gita* and interconnects them.

Just as there is divine nature behind the phenomenal nature, there is also the divine mind behind the phenomenal mind. True spirituality lies in the recognition and apprehension of the Divinity underlying the phenomenal world of mind and matter.

The universe can be regarded as an integral number. Just as the primal number “1” is an integral part of all other conceivable numbers, divinity is substantial to the world. Similarly, *Aum* is the primordial *akshara* from which all other sounds and letters have emanated. We must ultimately recognise and experience the one monistic and non-dualistic reality behind the phenomenal multiplicity of forms and names. We must give up attachment to the mutable and perishable physical body in order to appreciate and apprehend the spiritual unity in material diversity. We must try and merge with the *akshara* or the undecaying reality of *Brahman*. We must go from darkness to light and from death to immortality.

The *deha* or the physical body is only an *upadhi* or instrument. It is the spirit within which is the *sakthi* or the witness. *Karma* cannot cease as long as attachment to the decaying body continues. Attachment to the body should be substituted by the realisation of the reality of the *Atma*. The *deha* or the physical body

composed of the five elements, namely, earth, fire, water, air and ether, and subject to disease, decay, and death, cannot cross the ocean of *samsara*. That is why one must surrender himself at the Lotus Feet of God and realise that he is not the *deha* (the mortal body) but the *dehi* (the divine *Atma* inhabiting the *deha*), not the *sarira* (body) but the *sariri* (the divine *Atma* residing in the *sarira*).

Why should you buy an ordinary cow when you have with you the *kama dhenu*, the wish-fulfilling divine cow? Why should you grow fond of a fruit tree in your orchard when you have found the *kalpatharu*, the wish-fulfilling divine tree? Having found the Bliss of the *Atma*, why should you crave for the inferior pleasures of the body?

The sky is reflected in the water in a vessel. When the vessel breaks, the image of the sky merges with the limitless sky. So also, with the disintegration of the physical body, the *Atma* merges with the *Paramatma*. Krishna exhorted Arjuna to meditate on the Immutable *Akshara* in order to experience the Omnipresent Reality of the *Paramatma*. Reminding Arjuna of his role in the divine drama of the universe, Krishna told him that he was only an instrument of the Divine Will. He poured the nectar of the *Gita* into Arjuna’s being and granted him immortality.