

Chapter 13. Mantras and Repetition of the Name

Q. Is there any mantra or repetition of the name (*japa*) that will give us this peaceful (*santhi*) state that you spoke about just now? If there is any, which is the important one?

A. Mantra and repetition of the name are essential for all types of people. What is a mantra? *Ma* means *manana* (reflection, understanding) and *thra* means saving, so *mantra* means that which can save you if you meditate on it. A mantra will save you from being caught up in the coils of this worldly life, which is infested with death, grief, and pain. Of all mantras, the *Om (pranava)* is the highest and the best. It is the very head and crown of all of them.

Q. Suppose each one does repetition of the name of their chosen deity according to their own light. I believe it is not wrong. Or is it?

A. You mean that however savage or foolish people may be, they cannot but call on the Lord! Well, if the name is recited along with *Om*, it is bound to be beneficial. Just as the waters of the ocean are raised into the sky by the rays of the sun and then, falling as rain, form rills and rivers and rush toward the ocean to become the waters of the ocean again, so all sounds and mantras that were once only *Om* reach the *Om* through repetition and other disciplines and rites. They all get merged in *Om*, their source.

Q. Swami! Some elders have said that the more seed syllables (*bija-aksharas*) a mantra has, the more effective it is. Are such mantras to be preferred to others that have only a few seed syllables?

A. I don't agree with the view that fewer seed syllables diminish the chance for concentration in meditation. Spiritual seekers would be benefitted more if they repeat the five syllables or eight syllables with the *Om (pranava)* added in the beginning. When they have proceeded some distance thus, they can give up even the words, concentrate on the form depicted through the sound, and transform the mantra into the God (*Devatha*) Himself. That is why the scripture (*sruthi*) says, "Brahma is silence, the absence of sound (*Nish-sabdo Brahma Uchyathe*)."

Q. How are we to create a vacuum of sound? How can that be *Brahman*?

A. The scriptures declare that this objective world is worldly illusion (*maya*). They also say that He who has all this illusion under His control is the Master (*Iswara*). So try to have all this illusion under control and become the Lord yourself.

The stage when, as far as you are concerned, the objective world has come to nought is the stage when you attain the Supreme Absolute *Brahman*. Until the objective world is set to nought, you cannot attain *Brahman*; that is certain. Like the snake that discards its skin and assumes a new skin, the spiritual aspirant discards the old skin and puts on the skin of the deity indicated by the mantra upon which the aspirant concentrates.

Q. Pardon me, Swami! I can't understand all this. Make it clear through some more examples.

A. You have seen an egg, yes? When the bird sits on the egg for some time, the chick grows inside it to its full stature; when the shell of the egg is broken, the chick emerges and assumes its real form. In the same way, when the spiritual aspirant, with a purified consciousness, dwells on the mantra and its meaning and revolves its significance in the mind without break, the vision grows in his mind without break, the shell of ignorance (*a-jnana*) breaks, and the aspirant shines in the splendour of the divinity that has formed in their consciousness.

Q. All things originate from *Om (pranava)* and all things finally merge in *Om*, they say. Then why do the very elders who say this declare that some can pronounce this and some cannot?

A. What is the world, except the commingling of the five elements? The *Om* is the very life of all the elements, so it is the life-breath of the world itself. The roar of waters falling down a cliff and the beating of waves on a promontory of the shore repeat only the *Om*. The sound of inhaling and exhaling is itself the sacred sound (*pranava*), isn't it? Whether they know it or not, the heigh-ho of the men who carry a palanquin on their shoulders, the heave of those who lift weights, the heehoy of those who beat clothes on slabs by the riverside—all resound with the *Om*. Repeat it with a full knowledge of its inner significance, and you will soon be relieved of the burden of this world's worry.

The *Om* (*pranava*) of the breathing process is also the saviour from grief. It is meaningless to argue that some have the right to utter the *Om* and some don't. Those who don't breathe may not have the authority to utter it, but all who breathe are reciting it already in the process, so there is no sense in denying it to any one.

Do you know Krishna's reply when Arjuna asked how one should remember the Lord at the point of death? He said that one should recall to mind the *Om*, which is undifferentiated from Him. He said that such a devotee will attain the highest goal. So everyone has the right to this great mantra, the *Om* sound (*pranava*).

Q. How can the goal be reached through meditation practice of the *Om* sound? How can the person who meditates become transformed into the thing meditated upon? Please make this unequalled mantra, and the way it helps us, clearer to me by means of easy illustrations.

A. Very good. The *Om* sound (*pranava*) is the bow; the *Atma* is the arrow; the Universal Absolute *Brahman* is the target. Like the practitioner of the art of archery, the spiritual aspirant must be unaffected by things that agitate the mind. The Bowman who is paying one-pointed attention to the target is filled with the target and becomes the thing meditated on. In the *Kaivalya Upanishad*, the *Mundaka Upanishad*, and various parts of the scripture (*sruthi*), the *Om* is extolled in various ways.

Hence, this mantra, which liberates people, can be recited and meditated upon by all. All can practise *Om* worship. You need have no doubt on this point.