

24. Pranavopaasana

Hearken to the Pranava that emanates

from the heart of the Cosmos!

Fill your ears earnestly with

Its reverberations

Know that It is the wish-fulfilling

Tree that fulfills all desires

Forget not these wise words of good counsel.

Vedaanaam Saama Vedosmi ("Among the Vedas, I am the *Sama Veda*---) proclaimed the Gitacharya Sri Krishna. *Saamnaa Udgitho Rasah* ("The essence of the *Sama* hymns is *Udgitha*") declares the Chandogya Upanishad. *Udgitha* means the *Pranava*. The essence of the *Sama Veda* is the *Pranava* (*Om*). *Pranava* is the very life-breath. *Omkaaram Sarva Vedaanaam*---the scriptures have also declared that *Omkaara* (the sacred syllable *Om*) is the supreme *mantra* in the *Vedas*. From this it will be realised how supremely important the *Omkaara* is in the eyes of the seers and what great significance is attached to It.

The single syllable "Om" is pre-eminent among the letters of the alphabet. It symbolises the *Paramatma* (Supreme Omni-Self). The *Sama Veda* is the embodiment of *Pranava*.

Music in *Sama Veda*

The sage Vyasa first taught the *Sama Veda* to Maharishi Jaimini. From Jaimini, it was taught to a succession of disciples and in the process it developed many *saakhas* (branches). Out of the one thousand branches which stemmed from the *Veda*, today only three have survived among its practioners. The others have been lost by the ravages of time. These three branches are: *Kouthuma*, which is followed by *Nagar Brahmanas* in Gujarat; *Raanaayani*, with its adherents in Maharashtra; *Jaimini*, followed by a section in Karnataka. There are no big differences between the *Kouthuma* and *Raanayani saakhas*. "Haa", "Hoo.", "Raa", "Ni" are important syllables for the *Kouthuma* and *Raanayani saakhas*. For the *Raanayani saakha*, the main syllables are "Aa Aa", "Oo-Oo", "Raa" and "Nee", the sounds being lengthened during recitation.

The *Jaimini saakha* is a short one, but is more important than others. It is broad based and has a wider appeal because of its accent on the musical form. There are two versions of it: *Aaranyi* (forest hymns) and *Gaanam* (musical hymns). There are four kinds of songs in these hymns' *Graameena gaanamu* (village songs); *Aaranyaka gaanamu*; *Oohagaanamu* and *Oohyagaanamu*. *Grameena* or village songs are songs which used to be sung by villagers in their daily activities or during festivals in group dances. They enjoyed themselves in singing such songs. *Aaranyaka* songs were sung while taking cattle to the forests for grazing. The songs were sung with full-throated voices in an uninhibited way. Singing the praise of the Lord, sitting under a tree, they derived spontaneous delight from these songs.

Oohagaanam resembles the cinema music of our days. Here the singer expresses in the rendering the mood of the song--either grief or joy--by artificial modulations of the voice to produce the impression of grief or joy as conceived by the singer. It lacks genuine feeling. *Oohyagaana* is the type of singing in which the singer gives free vent to his emotions and enjoys the singing as

much as he seeks to communicate his joy to others. The *Sama Veda* has given to the world these four kinds of music.

***Pranava* is present in every living being**

The *pranava mantra* ranks, higher than all this music. It is all-pervasive and ever-present. There cannot be a single moment when we are not listening to this *pranava*. Nor can we dispense with it even for a second. The *Pranava* is present in every living being. The *Pranava* is the primordial sound on which all sounds are based. The *Pranava* has been equated with the *Brahman* (the Cosmic Self). The Gita has declared

Om as the monosyllable representing *Brahman*. Even as *Om* is all-pervasive, the *Brahman* is also all-pervasive. The *Vedic* dictum, *Ayam Atma Brahma* (This' *Atma* is *Brahman*) points out that *Atma* and *Brahman* are one and the same. Hence *Om*, *Brahman* and *Atma* signify the same entity.

The effulgence and the effulgent in dream state

Every human being experiences four states of consciousness in daily life; *Jagrata* (the waking state), *Swapna* (dream state), *Sushupti* (deep sleep) and *Turiya* (the highest state of consciousness). The waking state is the state in which one sees and experiences the phenomenal world through the five life-breaths, the senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego. There are also the five sheaths for the body. All these together account for the experience of the phenomenal world in the waking state. Without the *Atma*, the waking state or experience of the phenomenal world cannot exist. Hence the *Atma* in this state is known as *Viswa*. It is also called *Vaiswanara* or *Viraatpurusha*. Krishna is stated to have revealed to Arjuna His *Viswaroopa* (cosmic form). This really means that Krishna showed to Arjuna that the Divine is present everywhere in all things at all times. The entire cosmos is a projection of the Divine.

The *Atma* that appears in the waking state as the phenomenal cosmos in its gross form, appears in the dream state in its *sookshma* (*subtle*) form. The objects and forms that are experienced in the dream state have a reality only in that state. They have no existence in other states. All the joys and sorrows experienced in the dream state are unique self-created experiences of the *Atma*. If ten persons are sleeping in one room, their dream experiences are unique to each person and have nothing in common. This means that each person creates his own dream state and experiences his dreams.

There is a light that shines in a dream state. This is known as *Tejas*. The *Atma* as the experiencer in this state is known as *Taijasa* (the effulgent). Apart from dreams, the presence of *Taijasa* can be demonstrated by a simple example. When we close our eyes, we say it is dark and we cannot see anything. Who is it that is able to experience this darkness? There is some entity that experiences darkness when the eyes are closed and describes it as dark and black. That entity is described as *Taijasa* because it is present as an inner light during the dream state.

***Prajna* is the state of permanent bliss**

In the third state of *Sushupti*, the experience of the waking and the dream states are absent. It is the state of deep sleep. All the senses are merged in the mind and nothing can be seen or imagined. In this state *Prajna* {integrated awareness} alone exists. It is because of *Prajna* that one is aware of this state. All the sense organs are totally inactive. Only the breathing process remains. It is because of *Prajna* that one is aware of continuity of Being in deep sleep state and and experiences a feeling of bliss.

With all the senses stilled, the Self alone is conscious in the form of *Prajna* manifested in respiration. Hence the *Vedas* have declared: "*Prajnaanam Brahma*" (*Prajna--Constant Integrated Awareness--is Brahman*). *Prajna* is the state of unchanging and permanent bliss described by the Upanishads. *Prajna* is the permanent entity that exists equally in the waking state as the body, in the senses as the *Antahkarana* (the Inner Motivator) and in the deep sleep state as *Atma*. It is for this reason that it is characterised as Constant Integrated Awareness. It is not different from Brahman or Atma. A doubt may arise that neither Brahman nor *Atma* is visible. But by understanding the Pranava, the identity of the *Brahman* and *Atma* can be experienced.

How do we cognise the Pranava and hear it? it is not perceivable. It is like something to be absorbed. All that is seen in the visible universe, all that is heard in the realm of sound, all the multifarious experiences of the heart--all of them are subsumed by the Pranava. Even in the state of deep sleep, the process of breathing in and breathing out goes on ceaselessly. That which sustains the breathing process is *Omkaara*, which thus proclaims its identity with the Brahman and the *Atma*.

The fourth state is Turiya. This is a state of complete ineffable Bliss in which the Universal Consciousness alone is experienced. It is beyond description.

Omkaara is viewed as the four-faced Brahma

Like the four states of consciousness, the *Omkaara* has also four constituents. These are: *A-kaara*, *Ukaara*, *Ma-kaara* and *Adhiratha* (the humming sound--mm...). *A-kaara* is the first and foremost sound of *Omkaara*. It is the first letter of the alphabet. In the waking state, it is regarded as a manifestation of the *Viraatpurusha* and is personified as *Viswa*, the ruling power and sustainer of the phenomenal world.

U is the syllable representing the dream state. It is the second sound of *Omkaara*. It has the form of *Tejas* or effulgence. It illumines everything and dispels every kind of darkness. The third sound is *Ma*. It represents the state of *Prajna* (Integrated Consciousness). It reveals the inner meaning of everything. It is also known as the unifying entity, *Antaryami* (the Inner Controller), the *Suthraatmaka* (the *Atmic* coordinator). These different names indicate that the *Atma* is the Indweller in all beings. It has no form. *Ma* thus signifies this profound truth. After the "A", "U" and "Ma" are combined, the fourth sound emerges. That is the sound that is heard in *Turiya* state. It is the vibration "mm ..." known as *Adhiratha*.

Because *Omkaara* has four sounds, it is viewed as the four-faced *Brahma*. It is also described as *Sabda-Brahmam*, the *Brahman* in the form of cosmic sound. The *Sabda-Brahmam* contains *Gaana-Brahmam* (the *Brahman* as music). The *Sabda-Brahmam* pervades everywhere. The all-pervasive character of *Sabda-Brahmam* is first among eight cosmic powers attributed to the Divine.

Understand the inner meaning of *Sama Veda*

It is only when the unique spiritual significance of "*Omkaara*" is understood and experienced and when it is realised that all that one sees or hears emanates from the *Pranava*, will one be able to understand the inner meaning of the *Sama veda*. The cosmic power of the sound can be known when the *Sama Veda* and *Pranava* are properly understood. This knowledge cannot be got by external exploration. It has to be got from within. When the source of all light and sound---the *Pranavaswarupa*---is within one, of what avail is it to search for them outside? The first

requisite is to acquire the faith that the Lord, who is manifest in Cosmic Sound, is present within as *Pranavakaara* (the form of *Pranava*).

For nourishing this faith, it is necessary to abjure impurity in speech. No room should be given for speaking bad words or listening to bad talk. Excessive speech has to be eschewed. Idle talk, slanderous gossip and back-biting should be totally given up. There is great energy in the power of speech. It should not be wasted in any way. This is the supreme discipline that has to be cultivated in daily life.

Human life itself is one long *mantra*

This is the great message of the *Sama Veda*. It proclaims the divinity and delight that are inherent in words and sounds that are sacred and pure. Nothing that we say should cause pain to anyone. Whoever indulges in such speech is less than human.

In uttering *mantras* (sacred sounds), their meaning should be understood. Otherwise *the japa* (repetition of Divine Name) becomes mechanical ritual. Human life itself is one long *mantra*. It is also *tantra* (a spiritual technique). It is also a *yantra* (a symbolic spiritualised geometric device). Such a sacred gift should be utilised worthily.

Only one or two *Vedas* are prevalent today. We must resort to restore them in all their fullness and glory by realising the nectarine value of their message. We must recover faith in the Divine and make devotion to God the sheet-anchor of our lives. Without devotion all our education is valueless.

Devotion and Sacrifice

Embodiments of Divine Love! Man needs primarily two qualities' Devotion to God and the spirit of sacrifice. Without sacrifice there can be no devotion. Sacrifice is the key to immortality. Man is caught up in the coils of selfishness and self-centredness. How long will these attachments last? Why sacrifice the lasting bliss of a divinely oriented life for the petty tinsel of worldly possessions? Devote yourselves to the service of mankind in a spirit of dedication and sublimate your lives.

Your job is no doubt important for earning a living. But you must be prepared even to sacrifice it for serving the nation and upholding Truth, with faith in God. All possessions and relationships are transient. Only two things are permanent: *Dharma* (righteousness) and *Keerthi* (a good name). A good name is got only through one's good actions and not as a gift from others. Avoid everything evil and cultivate the company of the good, and be good in thought, word and deed.

Realise the omnipresence of the Divine in the form of *Omkaara*, as proclaimed in the *Sama Veda*. Practise *Omkaara Upasana* (meditation of the primal sound principle) with the consciousness that the Divine is omnipresent and achieve merger in the Divine as the goal of human birth.

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