

THE COMPLETE
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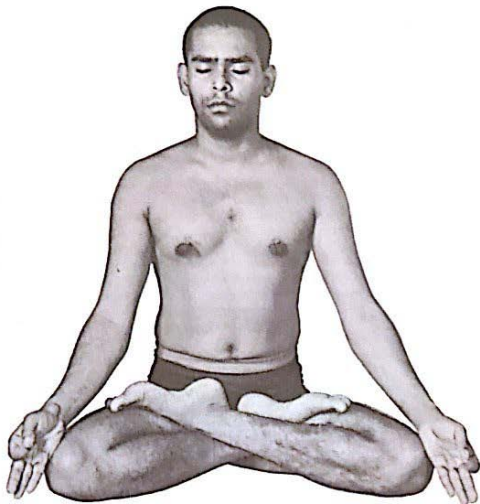
Swami Vishnudevananda

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of stopping this tossing is through Yogic breathing (see Breathing, Chapter 8), devotion, and chanting.

3. The last is the subtlest of all impurities, known as *avarana sakthi*, or the veiling power of the mind. This *avarana sakthi* clouds the pure consciousness or self, and produces body consciousness. This is the most difficult impurity (the idea of body consciousness) to get rid of. Vedantic meditation and the inquiry, "Who am I?" removes this veiling power. Only then can the self shine of itself.

THE PHILOSOPHY AND MEANING OF THE SACRED SYLLABLE OM

Several volumes have been written to explain the meaning of the great syllable *OM*. In fact, all Vedanta and all Hindu philosophy is simply an exposition of this syllable *OM*. *OM* covers the whole universe. There is not a law, a force, or an object in all the world that is not comprised within the syllable *OM*. We shall try to explain how all the planes of being, all the worlds, all phases of existence are encompassed by *OM*. The importance of this syllable will be explored from various points of view in order that people may attempt to grasp it with their minds as well as accept it with their whole hearts. As we are all rational beings, we should not take up anything unless it appeals to our intellect.

The literal meaning of Vedanta is the end of knowledge, the end of speech; and the whole of Vedanta is represented by *OM*. *OM* consists of *A*, *U*, *M*, and according to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, *A* and *U* when joined together become *O*, and thus *A*, *U*, *M*, produces the sound *OM*. The sound of *OM* is the most natural sound that can be uttered; even a mute can produce this sound. Observe boys in a playground when they are very happy; their overflowing joy finds natural expression with a prolonged sound of *O*, which is simply *OM* cut short. Not only children, but all people use this sound on occasions when they feel exhilarated, whether it is at a football game, a horse race, or a party. It is common to note that many people answer "Oh, yes," or "Oh, my God!" When one is sick in bed or in trouble, when one is suffering from extreme pain, this sound of *oh* or *um*, which is a corrupted expression of *OM*, comes from one's lips. The Hebrew, Arab, and English prayers end with "Amen," which most remarkably resembles *Aum*.

Why should this sound be so prominent in everybody's life? The answer is because it is a natural sound; it brings relief from pain for a sick person; it expresses mental moods in the form of sounds, which in turn bring peace and harmony. If one gets a little relief from pain by uttering this sound incorrectly, then may it not bring more peace and harmony if it is chanted in the right way? This OM is also known as *pranava*, or that which pervades life or runs through the *prana* or breath. Even the sound of bells, the noise of a flowing river, the whistling of the wind, or blowing of a conch shell produces the sound OM.

All thought is related to language as the obverse and reverse sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. Can anyone see an object without thinking of it? Nothing is perceived without thinking accordingly. The very word "perceive" signifies mental thought. Thought and language are the same, and one cannot think without language.

Absence of language occurs primarily in two cases: in intuitive perception and intuitive ideation. Intuitive ideation is the formation of a mental image of an object. I see a tree and close my eyes and see it again in mental image. Every form is associated with a name and utterance of a name brings forth the picture of the object. When I say "chair," immediately the form of a chair appears in my mind. Though many mental images of sights and sounds occur that do not always bring up their names, and though this intuitive process may actually take place without language, yet in description, analysis, classification, judgment, and other mental elaborations, language is indispensable. One can look at the moon without remembering the name of the moon, but when one analyzes and thinks of what it is, then language comes. Therefore, nothing is perceived in this world without thought, and there can be no thought without language. Thus the world is related to language; language, to thought; and thought, to the world.

In the Bible it is said: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The word or language is not something arbitrary or invented. No man ever invented language because the word itself is God. The Vedic language (the original language) was revealed by God directly to the mind and when it was corrupted, it was called human language. Now we want to have a single word or sound that will represent the whole world. In all languages we have some sounds that come from the throat, others that come from the palate, and others from the lips. There is not a single sound in any language that comes from organs below the throat, as

the throat is the one boundary of the vocal organ, and none come from outside the lips as the lips are the other boundary. Now we have *A*, *U*, *M*. The sound *A* is guttural; it comes from the throat, *U* (*oo*) proceeds exactly from the middle of the vocal region, the palate, *M* is labial and nasal, which comes from the extremity of the vocal organ or lips.

Thus, *A* represents the beginning of the range of sound; *U* represents the middle, and *M* represents the end. It covers the whole field of the vocal organs. Thus *OM* represents all language and, since world and language are interrelated, it represents all the world.

Sounds are of two kinds: articulate or *varnatmak* and inarticulate or *dhvanyatmak*. *Varnatmak* sounds are capable of being written, while *dhvanyatmak* cannot be expressed by characters or by written words. Ordinary language is *varnatmak*, and the language of feeling, such as laughter and weeping, is *dhvanyatmak*. Laughter cannot be expressed in written language.

The articulate or natural language (*dhvanyatmak*) has a purpose that cannot be served by *varnatmak*. Suppose a foreigner who does not know the language of another country wants some food, and people cannot understand his language. He may then start weeping because of hunger; this language of feeling (weeping) can be understood and people give him food. When you laugh, everyone understands that something pleasant has happened. The language of music is also *dhvanyatmak*. The language of music is different from the language of thought. In melodious music there is a charming effect upon the mind. Similarly, *OM* chanting has a charm about it that brings the mind of one who chants under control and directly brings the feeling of peace and rest to the mind. In that state the individual is one with God. Though the effect of the chanting of *OM* cannot be scientifically proved, it is nonetheless experienced by all who practice it sincerely. There is no denying the changes within oneself when they take place.

Now let us discuss the philosophy of *AUM*. The sound *A*, according to the teaching of Vedanta, represents the so-called material universe, the world of the gross senses, that which is observed in the waking state. All the experience of the dream world and the world of spirits, the astral plane, and heaven and hell are signified by *U*. *M* represents the unknown, the deep-sleep state and all those things which are beyond the comprehension of the intellect.

Thus, *AUM* (*OM*) covers all the threefold experience of man (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep).

It is a common thing to note that generally the philosophy of the West is based on experience in the waking state and takes little or

no notice of the experience of the dream or of the deep-sleep state. Vedanta says that in order to find out the reality or truth, one must analyze all three states of experience of man; otherwise the data will be incomplete. Most philosophers limit themselves to the waking state, and all their discoveries and investigations are based on the waking state alone. Vedanta considers all the data from the threefold experiences. The world of the waking state disappears entirely in the other two states, dreaming and deep sleep.

In dreams, though the external world disappears, it is the same "I" which perceives. The intellect and personal consciousness vanish entirely in the deep-sleep state and yet the real "I" or self remains the same. Thus "I" or self is the same in all these three states, and this self is the underlying reality that experiences all these states. This unchangeable and immutable principle, this reality that remains constant through the threefold worlds, is the true self or *atman*. This is *OM*.

How do we know that the world exists? How do we know there is a universe? Because we touch, hear, see, smell, and taste things; that is the only proof. Our senses are the only direct or indirect proof of the existence of this world.

Sensation is the primary cause of all perception, intellectual understanding, etc., and it is not limited to our waking state alone. In the waking state our senses are in the gross form and we perceive objects. But we perceive in our dream state also. The sense organs operate in the dream state even though the external ears and eyes are not functioning. Thus in effect the dreaming mind evokes simultaneously both the object and the sense organs that perceive the object. So in dreamland the senses and the objects sensed are like the positive and negative poles of the same object. In dreams the subject and the object spring up together. Both the subject and the object of dreams are represented by the sound *U* in *AUM*, and the underlying reality, in which both the subject and the object appear as waves in the ocean, is the pure self or *OM*.

Although objects in dreams are produced simultaneously with the corresponding perceiving senses, they appear to have a long past of their own and as long as one is dreaming, so long is the dream reality for one's consciousness. When we say that this solid, rigid world is real, the statement is entirely founded on the evidence of perceiving senses and is equivalent to the dreaming person calling the object of the dream real whereas in reality both waking and dreaming states are unreal.

The senses themselves exist only by virtue of the elements they

perceive. Without the objective world of the elements, the senses could not perceive whether they were in a dreaming or a waking state; so for the existence of the senses the objective world is essential. In the same way, for the existence of the world the senses are essential. Is that not reasoning in a circle? It is, indeed, and serves only to prove the illusory nature of the world in the waking state as in the dream state. The objects of dreams are real as long as the dream lasts. Those objects are no more when one wakes. In the deep-sleep state, what happens to the solid world of the waking state? Everything disappears. Thus we see that there is no reality to the world either in the waking state or in the dream state.

Vedanta defines reality as that which persists in all circumstances. That which appears as reality at one time and disappears like a mist after awhile must be an illusory phenomenon. The dreamland we call unreal because when we are awake it is not there. Just so the solid must be unreal because it also vanishes in the dream and deep-sleep states.

Then what is reality? The sound *A* in *AUM* represents the apparent subject (senses) and object (elements or world) of the waking state as mere manifestations of the underlying reality, *me*. The only hard reality is the Self or "I," which never changes in any state. That "I" is the witness of the waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep states. Thus Vedanta comes to the conclusion that all the three states of man, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, are unreal and the real self, which is knowledge absolute, existence absolute, and bliss absolute, is the only stern reality, before which the apparent reality of the world melts away.

Many do not like to accept this conclusion because it is derived from considering the dreaming and deep-sleep states as rivals of the waking state. If we analyze our lives, almost half of the time we are either in a dreaming or a deep-sleep state. There being night at any time over half the surface of the earth, almost half the population is always in the dreaming or deep-sleep state. Thus a man spends almost half of his life either in sleep or in dream. Childhood is a long dream. If we count the time, the hours spent in the waking state are almost equal to the time spent in sleeping and dreaming. Therefore we cannot consider only those things that take place in the waking state as all of reality and the other states as unreal. Even the strongest man or wisest man without exception is bound by the law of sleep, and the inexorable power of sleep takes no account of his ardent desire to stay awake and enjoy the sense world. Since the dream and deep-sleep states are as

powerful as the waking state, we cannot neglect these former two states and consider only the latter. That is why Vedanta philosophy delves deeply into all the threefold states of man to find out the underlying reality. Again there are plants in a state of perpetual deep sleep and there are animals in a constant state of dreaming. To them our world is different. To the eyes of an ant, a frog, an elephant, a fish, or an owl things are very different. How dare we disregard their experience and consider the waking state of man alone as real?

Thus in OM (AUM) the first letter A stands for this reality, the self, as underlying and manifesting the illusory material world of the waking state. U represents the dream and the psychic or astral worlds, and the last letter, M, denotes the absolute self underlying the chaotic state and represents all the unknown, the deep sleep. Thus OM means the underlying reality behind the scenes, the eternal truth, the indestructible self that one is, and when OM is chanted one must throw the body and mind into the true self and melt into the real *atman* or pure consciousness.

A Yogi through *pranayama* and meditation on OM transcends one by one all the planes and finally reaches the seventh and the last stage, where the soul is freed from all bondage and merges with the cosmic consciousness. The development of the mind determines which one of the seven stages to conquer death a Yogi has achieved, how far or how near he is to his higher self. The seven stages may be described as follows.

The first stage is *subhecha* or a longing for the truth. One who has rightly distinguished between the permanent and impermanent, who has cultivated a feeling of dislike toward worldly pleasures, who having acquired full mastery over his *physical body* and *mind* feels an insatiable longing to free himself from this cycle of birth and death, has attained this first stage.

The second stage is *vicharana* or right inquiry. He who has pondered over what he has read and heard and has realized the truth in his life has attained the second stage. This is not an intellectual understanding. He knows the truth by realizing it in himself through constant practice and not by blind faith.

The third stage is *tanumanasa* or the fading of the mind. When the mind, having abandoned the many (the external world), remains steadily fixed on the one (supreme being), it has attained the third stage.

The fourth stage is *satvapatti* or attainment of the state of *sattva* or purity. Having reduced his mind by the three previous stages to a state of pure *sattva* or purity, when man knows directly in himself the

truth (I am Brahman or God), he is in the fourth stage. This is a direct experience and not an intellectual understanding that "I am Brahman." In this stage intuition takes the place of the intellect; it is above the intellect, as the intellect is limited.

In these first four stages man practices *samprajnata samadhi* or contemplation, where the consciousness or duality still lingers. He feels the separation from the object of contemplation. In this state of consciousness he is not completely identical or one with his higher self as duality still lingers in his consciousness. Up to this stage he is considered to be a practitioner or student.

The three remaining stages beyond the *samprajnata samadhi* are knower, knowledge, and known. Here the individual self merges with the higher self. Hence there is nothing to be known or meditated upon; with nothing to be meditated upon, there cannot be any objective knowledge. As the individual self or "I" consciousness merges with universal consciousness wherein man sees nothing external to himself, there cannot be any knower either. These three stages are known as: (1) *asamsaktha*, being unaffected by anything; (2) *pararthabhavina* where the external things do not appear to exist; and (3) *turya*, where the Yogi sees nothing but God everywhere.

When the Yogi is unaffected by the psychic powers (*sidhis*) that manifest themselves at this stage, he attains the stage called *asamsaktha* or being unaffected by anything. This is the fifth stage.

In the sixth stage the external things to the consciousness of the Yogi do not appear to exist; hence this stage is known as *pararthabhavina*.

The seventh stage is called *turya*. The Yogi sees nothing but Brahman or God everywhere. In this state a Yogi neither performs his daily duties himself nor is prompted by others, but remains in a state of perpetual *samadhi* or superconsciousness. This state of experience of a Yogi wherein he knows in himself bliss absolute, knowledge absolute, and existence absolute can never be explained by ordinary human language. Here individual self merges with the all-pervading supreme self as a drop of water merges with the ocean and becomes one with it.

For undeveloped minds, this idea of losing the individual consciousness is frightening. This is only because of the veiling power of the mind, which limits the consciousness and brings false pictures and ideas, which frighten him. Yogi philosophy declares that self-realization or God realization alone can bring real peace, joy, and liberation of the embodied souls. Yogi realizes that the self alone exists, which is manifest as the universe. Everything in the universe is that one self, appear-

ing in various forms. He realizes that the self, when it appears behind the universe, is called God and that the same self when it appears behind this body is the individual soul or *jiva*.

Yogi realizes "I am Brahman." The whole universe is myself. Whatever exists, I am. "I am neither the body, nor the organs, nor was I the mind; I am existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute; I am he." Where is knowledge for me? I am knowledge itself. I am the free one. Where is joy for me? I am bliss itself. This is the knowledge or realization that a Yogi attains: this knowledge brings freedom and freedom is the goal of all nature. Bondage of the soul is death and freedom of the soul is the liberation or conquest of death.

OM TAT SAT