

Mundaka

Continued from previous issues.....

Mantra 3

धनुर्गृहीत्वौपनिषदं महास्त्रं
शरं ह्युपासानिशितं सन्धयीत ।
आयम्य तद्भावगतेन चेतसा
लक्ष्यं तदेवाक्षरं सोम्य विद्धि ॥ २ ॥ २ ॥ ३ ॥

dhanurgrhītvāupaniṣadam mahāstram
śaram hyupāsāniśitam sandhayīta .
āyamyadbhāvagatena cetasā
lakṣyam tadevākṣaram somya viddhi.(2.2.3)

dhanuḥ - bow; grhītvā - taking;
aupaniṣadam - that which obtains in the upaniṣads;
mahāstram - the great weapon; śaram - arrow; hi - indeed;
upāsā-niśitam - sharpened by meditation;
sandhayīta - fix; āyamyā - pulling the string of the bow;
adbhāvagatena - committed to the meaning of Om; cetasā - with the mind; lakṣyam - the target; tad - that; eva - only; akṣaram - Brahman; somya - O pleasing one; viddhi - strike

O pleasing one! May you take the great bow of Om that is revealed in the *upaniṣads* and fix the arrow of mind that is sharpened by meditation. Then may you strike the target of Brahman with a mind that is committed to the meaning of Om by pulling the string of the bow.

Om is called *aupaninadam*, that which is known through the *upaniṣads*. As a sound symbol Om covers all the forms that are here. There is a small difference between a word and a symbol. A word is not just a symbol, it reveals something. Between *abhidhāna*, the word, and *abhidheya* the object revealed by the word there is an *aikya-sambandha*, relationship of oneness. So one cannot think of a word without the object, if one knows the meaning of the word. As one repeats the word 'pot' one recognizes its meaning also. Without the object, the word does not exist at all. A symbol on the other hand is that upon which one can superimpose something else. Here the non-dual *Brahman*, in the form of the *jagat* as well as free from the *jagat*, is superimposed upon that single syllabic sound *Om*. *Om* is a *pratīka*, a sound symbol which is different from *pratimā*, a form symbol.

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The non-dual Brahman, in the form of the jagat as well as free from the jagat, is superimposed upon that single syllabic sound Om. Om is a pratéka, a sound symbol which is different from pratimā, a form symbol.

When one utters Om *Brahman* is recognized. When it is said, 'Om is everything,' what is meant is *Brahman* is everything. Therefore, Om becomes an object for contemplation. It stands for both aspects of *Brahman*. How does it cover Brahman?

Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad first tells us,⁷⁷ 'All that is here is Om. What was before, what is now and what will be later is Om.' in the very next mantra the *upaniṣad* says, 'All that is here, all that was before and all that will be later is *Brahman*.'⁷⁸ *Brahman* is 'sarvam' and Om also is 'sarvam'. It means Om is *Brahman*. Om becomes a symbol for Brahman. Then the *upaniṣad* declares, 'This self-evident *ātman* is *Brahman*.'⁷⁹ Therefore, Om becomes a symbol for *atman* also.

The second mantra of *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad* further says, '*Atman* is of four quarters.'⁸⁰ Śāstra loads the three letters 'a', 'u' and 'm' on the 'fourth,' superimposing a lot of meaning on each of the sounds, 'a', 'u' and 'm' as well as the silence that follows 'm'. The letter 'a' stands for the waker, the waking world, the self identified with the total physical universe and the waking experience. It is from the 'a' that all other sounds are born.

The various experiences of the waker make up the dreamer and the dream world; it is the waker who goes into deep sleep. At the individual level, the waker and his world is called *viśva*, corresponding to *virāṭ* at the total level, manifest as the entire physical universe.

The dreamer, the dream world, the self identified with the total dream world and the dream experience are superimposed on the letter 'u'. The experience in dream is purely a thought world, so the dream stands for the subtle world. At the individual level, the dreamer and his dream world is called *taijasa*, corresponding to *hiranyagarbha* at the total level, manifest as the entire subtle universe. *Hiranyagarbha* is the total *prāṇa* and mind.

The letter 'm' represents the sleeper, the causal world, the self identified with the total causal world and the sleep experience. The *jagat* is in an unmanifest condition in the causal world. The sleeper, with his experience of unqualified ignorance, is called *prājña*. At the total level corresponding to *prājña*, the Lord is called *Īśvara* with *maya-sakti*

The *upaniṣad* uses logic for superimposing the waker and the waking world on 'a' and so on. When one utters Om, the sound 'o' resolves into the sound 'm'. It emerges from 'm' when Om is repeated again. It is also sustained by alone. Similarly, the waker and the dreamer resolve into the sleeper. They emerge again from the sleeper. The cycle continues. It is the same at the level of the total; it is from *Īśvara* that the universe emerges. The individual level is called *vyāṣṭi* and the total level is called *samaṣṭi*. All three expressions, at the *vyāṣṭi* and the *samaṣṭi* levels, resolve in *atman*, the *turiya*, 'fourth'. It is not really the 'fourth,' but it is independent of all three, and at the same time, all three are not independent of it.

In the above model, it is the manifest Lord that is described, the Lord with incidental attributes whose name is Om. It is a name for *Īśvara* in all his expressions. Thus, meditation on Om is considered highly exalted because it has *Īśvara* as the object of meditation and not particular deity.

One may raise an objection here. How can a letter, a word or a sound, which is manifest in nature, be a name for the unmanifest Brahman? As a sound symbol, Om arises from silence where there are no mātras. When you utter the letter 'm' the mouth closes and no further letter is possible until you open the mouth. So there is silence after 'm'. Silence is *amātrā*. Arising from *amātrā*, Om resolves in *amātrā*.

Similarly, *turīya*, the 'fourth' from which the entire jagat manifests and into which it resolves, has no *mātrās*. In *amātrā*, there is no 'a', 'u' or 'm', no waker, dreamer or sleeper. *Amātrā*, silence, is *caitanya ātman*, pure consciousness. When you chant 'Om', *caitanya ātman* is manifest in the form of the whole creation; when you stop chanting, *caitanya ātman* is free of manifestation.

The invariable is *caitanya ātman*, and that is the truth. The letters 'a', 'u' and 'm' and all that they represent are but superimpositions on *ātman*, which is why they can resolve in *ātman*. In the chant, Brahman is *saguṇa* with incidental attributes. When the chant ceases, Brahman is *nirguṇa*, free of all attributes, being its *svarūpa*, pure consciousness. It is how Om becomes a meaningful name for Brahman. It covers both aspects — the manifest and the un manifest.

Thus, one can view Om as a symbol standing for the entire jagat and meditate upon it. One can also look upon Om as a word revealing the *vastu*, which one has to understand. Here, Om is used for *upāsanā*, meditation in which one mentally repeats Om. Om straightaway points out *Īśvara*, covering all his expressions, and so *omkāra upāsanā* is considered to be the king of all *upāsanā*. One gains steadiness of mind by *omkāra upāsanā*. It also helps one to gain purity of mind. Repetition of Om being a mental action related to *Īśvara*, naturally one gains the grace of *Īśvara* which brings in cheerfulness of mind, and also, keeps away all obstacles.

Upāsanā is prescribed for those who are not *adhikārins*, who are ready for knowledge. Generally we do not come across an *adhikārin* in real life. After living a religious life alone a person understands that all the means at one's disposal will not give *mokṣa*, and what one wants in life is only *mokṣa*. With this understanding one goes to a teacher for this knowledge. Generally, by this time one's mind becomes senile; if it does not, if one is alert, then one is ready for this knowledge.

People do take to the study of Vedanta without this readiness. It is like putting the cart before the horse. Modern education helps develop one's cognitive skill well and that helps one understand the teaching of the *śāstra*. The understanding gives the freedom to face oneself. Then one traces one's way back identifying the inhibiting factors, if any, and removing them. It is a different process altogether. We are in a society where the structure is different from the one that existed a few centuries before. Our whole method has to undergo some change.

We can assume that the people who undergo modern education think properly. They have an interest to know. They also have enough pain to drive them to desire freedom. They are set for this knowledge. If the cognitive skill is lacking in a person, he or she will not be able to understand Vedanta. The person has to prepare oneself through this meditation on Om.

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Meditation based on Om as a means is advised here by the *śāstra* itself which says, *aupaniṣadam mahāstram dhanuḥ gṛhītṛvā*, taking bow which is a great astra revealed in the upaniṣads. In the Veda alone one finds Om. Astra is an arrow, but here it is taken as a bow, which is useful to send arrows. There are many *astras*, but Om is *mahāstra*, the final astra. If there is a king of all the mantras, it is Om. *Gṛhītṛvā* means receiving it properly from the guru, with understanding. Taking this great bow Om from the *upaniṣad*, what one should do is told now.

caraa hyupāsā-niṣitam sandhayīta: may one fix the arrow of mind sharpened by meditation on the bow. One has to set one's mind on Om. The arrow is one's mind. The bow is in the form of the chanted Om. It is the mind that is completely pervaded by Om. The chanted Om is the bow and the understanding mind is the arrow. The target for the arrow is the meaning of Om. The mind should hit the target, grasp the meaning of the very Om. The mind should not have any other object since every object is included in Om. Om is not one of the objects. It is how the mind is set.

The arrow is not blunt arrow. If it has really got to do the job, then this arrow called mind should be sharp. It is made sharp by *upāsana*.⁸¹ For sharpening an arrow, one uses a wheel. Here also, one requires alertness to sharpen the mind. The mind is sharp and subtle when small mistakes look big to a person, that is, even the small notions in the mind become very obvious to the person. Living a life of *karma-yoga* and *upāsana*, along with one's daily prayers make the mind ready for this meditation. The repetition of Om itself makes the mind sharp.

Āyānya tad-bhāva-gatena cetasā: pulling the arrow of the mind that is committed to discovering the meaning of Om. There is no real pulling involved here. Śāṅkara says,⁸² it is just withdrawing the mind from all distractions. The word '*tad*' refers to *omkāra*. When you offer a flower to the altar you do not think, 'I am offering a flower to the stone.' You offer it to the Lord. Similarly, when you chant Om, you recognize its meaning. Recognition of the meaning of Om here is *tad-bhāva*. Or, it refers to the commitment of the mind to appreciate the implied meaning of Om.

Lakṣyaṁ tadevākṣaram somya viddhi: O pleasing one! May you understand that Brahman which is the target. *Viddhi* means 'may you strike.' Here it means, 'may you understand.' Understand that target as *akṣaram brahma*. You have to chant Om for a length of time and stay with the chant. Only then you grasp the meaning. Already you know the meaning of Om through listening. But it is not owned up. The meditation helps you own up the meaning of Om. The meaning of Om is consciousness that is invariable in all thoughts. It is something you can straightaway see. Every thought that occurs in the mind has to be recognized as *Brahman*. Then the thought really loses its virulence, and your vision is only in Brahman, which is you.

Om is a sound symbol, it is not a form symbol (its script form is not a symbol), nor can it be a part of any symbol created to represent other religious traditions. Om includes everything.

77 ओमित्येतदक्षरम् इदं सर्वम् । तस्योपख्याख्यानं भुतं भवत् भविष्यदिति सर्वमोद्धार एव । (माण्डूक्योपनिषत् १)

78 सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म । (माण्डूक्योपनिषत् २)

79 अयमात्मा ब्रह्म । (माण्डूक्योपनिषत् २)

80 सोऽयमात्मा चतुष्पात् । (माण्डूक्योपनिषत् २)

81 सन्तताभिध्यानेन तनूकृतं संस्कृतमित्येतद्, (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

82 आयम्य आकृष्य सोन्द्रियमन्तः -करणं स्व-विषयाद् विनिवर्त्य लक्ष्ये एवावर्जितं कृत्वा इत्यर्थः । न हि हस्तेन इव धनुषः आयमनम् इह सम्भवति । (मुण्डक भाष्यम्)

-to be continued