

25. Unique significance of *Omkaara*

MANTHRA is not a mere collection of words. It is a compounded set of words pregnant with enormous significance. It emanates from the inner power of man. Filled with such power, the *manthra* (sacred formula), when it is pronounced properly, brings out the Divine power in man. The vibrations produced by the utterance of the *manthra*, uniting with the Cosmic *naadha* (primal sound) in the Universe, become one with the Universal Consciousness. It is these Cosmic vibrations which assumed the form of the *Vedha* (sacred revelations of spiritual knowledge).

For all the *manthras*, the primary *manthra*, which enshrines the attributeless, Omniself, is the *Omkaara*. The *Omkaara* embodies in the form of sound the Supreme *Brahman*. For this sound, the presiding deity is Saraswathi. In common parlance Saraswathi is regarded as the consort of Brahma (Demi God of Creation). It is the union of Brahma and Saraswathi that accounts for all the knowledge in the world. Who is Brahma and who is Saraswathi? Saraswathi is commonly worshipped as the Goddess of Speech and as the deity who has to be propitiated for acquiring knowledge. She is also described as *Varadhe* (the giver of boons) and as *Kaamaruupini* (one capable of assuming any form). But Saraswathi is not one who conforms to these descriptions. Saraswathi is present in all beings as the Goddess of Speech.

***Omkaara* is the manifesting of *Brahman* as sound**

The body is regarded as Brahma and the tongue is regarded as Saraswati and the vibrations emanating from the heart find expression in sound through the union of the body and the tongue. Although there are many letters and words, the fundamental *aksharam* (letter), which has primacy of place, is the *Omkaara*. "*Om ithyekaaksharam Brahma* (the single letter OM is *Brahman* Itself) 'says the Geetha. All other letters and words are linguistic creations. They do not possess the unique sacredness and divine character of '*OM*.' The special significance of '*OM*' is not generally recognised or understood.

The Manthra Shaasthra (ancient scripture related to sacred formulas) has laid emphasis on the letter '*OM*'. *Omkaara* has no form. It is the manifestation of *Brahman* as sound. It is present in all creation. It is effulgent. It is in all speech. It is ever blissful. It is *Paraathparamyee* (embodiment of the Supreme). It is *Maayamayee* (the repository of illusory power). It is *Shreemayee* (embodiment of prosperity). The *Omkaara* is the only sound that has these 'eight divine attributes, according to the *Manthra Shaasthra*.

Only by elimination of ego can *Brahman* be realised

What is the difference between the *Omkaara* and all other sounds and words? The *Omkaara* has a unique, distinctive quality in the way it is pronounced and the goal it represents. When other letters are uttered, the lips, the tongue, the cheeks and the jaws are in action. But when the *Omkaara* is pronounced, none of these move at all. This is a unique characteristic of *Omkaara*. Hence '*OM*' alone can be regarded as *Aksharam* (imperishable). All the other sounds are expressions of different languages.

The *Omkaara* is the base for the *Vedha*. To grasp the full significance of *Omkaara*, which is all-pervasive, it is necessary to have the same kind of self-control which one has to exercise to bring the sensory organs under control.

In reciting any *manthra* the primacy to be accorded to OM should be recognised. The *manthra* ends with the word *Namah* (as for example, in *Om Keshavaaya Namah*: Prostrations to

Keshava). In the *manthras Keshavaaya namah, Govindhaaya namah, Naaraayanaaya namah*, the significance of *Namah* which occurs at the end of each *manthra* should be noted.

The worshipful attitude signified by the term *Namah* will be lost if the word *Om* is not used at the beginning of each *manthra*. It is only when *Om* is said at the beginning and *Namah* at the end that the full purport of the *manthra* will be brought out. The integral connection between *Om* and *namah* should be recognised. *Namah* represents *Prakrithi* (objective world). In ordinary parlance *Namah* is understood to mean *namaskaaram* (salutation). But it has a wider meaning. It means *Prakrithi* (the phenomenal world). *OM* connotes *Purusha* (Divinity). The purpose of the *manthra* is to reveal the connection between *Prakrithi* and *Purusha*. Based on the inner significance of this, the *Mahaavaakya* (great declaration) *Thath Thwam Asi* (That Thou Art) has to be understood. *Asi* is the link between "*Thath*" and *Thwam*. In *Aham Brahma asmi*, *Asmi* provides the link. In the *Mahaavaakya Prajnaanam Brahma, Asi* does not figure.

Only by elimination of ego can *Brahman* be realised

If in the *manthra Om Keshavaaya Namah* the word *Keshavaaga* is omitted, and *Om Namah* is uttered, the unity of *Shiva-Shakthi* (*Purusha* and *Prakrithi*) is established and the dualism implicit in the *manthra* is removed. The *manthra* states, "I am offering obeisance to Keshava," thereby positing two entities, besides the action of obeisance itself being a third element.

To eliminate this dualism, the *Manthra Shaasthra* laid down that if instead of *namah, na mama* (not for my sake) is employed, the identity of the worshipper and the worshipped will be established. "*Om Keshavaaga, na mama*" would mean "for Kesava, not for *me*." By this process, the ego is destroyed. And only by the elimination of the ego can the attributeless *Brahman* be realised.

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