

CHAPTER XIII

MANTHRA AND JAPA

- Q. Is there any Manthra or Japa that will give us this Santhi state that you spoke about just now? If there is any, which is the important one?
- A. Manthra and Japa are essential for all types of men. What is a manthra? *Ma* means *manana* (ruminating) and *thra* means saving; so manthra means that which can save you if you meditate on it. Manthra will save you from being caught up in the coils of this worldly life which is infested with death, grief and pain. Of all manthras, the Pranava is the highest and the best. It is the very head and crown of all of them.
- Q. Suppose each one does the Japam of the name of the Ishtadevatha, according to his own light; I believe it is not wrong. Or is it?

- A. You mean that however savage or foolish a man may be, he cannot but call on the Lord! Well, if the name is recited along with the Pranava, 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, they form rills and rivers and rush towards the ocean to become once again the waters of the ocean, all sounds and mantras that were once only Pranava, reach the Pranava through the Japa and other disciplines and rites. They all get merged in the Pranava, their source.
- Q. Swami! Some elders have said that the more *bijaaksharas* (seed sounds, root letters) a mantra has, the more effective it is. Are such mantras to be preferred to others which have only a few *bijaaksharas*?
- A. I don't agree with the view that when the number of *bijaaksharas* diminishes, there is less chance for concentration in Dhyana. Sadhakas would be benefited more if they repeat the Panchakshari or Ashtakshari with the Pranava added in the beginning. When they have proceeded some distance thus, they can give up even the words and concentrate on the Form depicted through the sound and transform the Mantra into the Devatha Himself. That is why the Sruthi says, "*Nissabdo Brahma Uchyathe*"—"Brahma is Silence, absence of Sound."

- Q. How are we to create a vacuum of sound? How can that be Brahman?
- A. The Sruthis declare that this objective world, this Prakriti, is Maya. They also say that He who has all this Maya under His control is Easwara. So, try to have all this creation under control and become Easwara yourself. The stage when, so far as you are concerned, the objective world has come to nought, is the stage when you attain Brahman. Until that is set at nought, you cannot attain Brahman; that is certain. Like the snake that discards its skin and assumes a new skin, the Sadhaka discards the old skin, puts on the skin of the Deity indicated by the mantra that he concentrates upon.
- Q. Pardon me, Swami! I cannot understand all this. Make it clear through some more examples.
- A. You have seen an egg, is it not? When the bird sits on the egg for some time, the chick grows inside it to its full stature and then, when the shell of the egg is broken, it emerges and assumes its real form. In the same way, when the Sadhaka, with a purified consciousness, dwells on the mantra and its meaning, and revolves its significance in his mind without break, the vision grows in his mind without break, the shell of Ajnana breaks and he shines in the splendour of the Divinity that he has formed in his consciousness.

- Q. All things originate from Pranava and all things finally merge in Pranava, they say. Then why is it that the very elders who say this declare that some can pronounce this and some cannot?
- A. What is Prakriti, except the commingling of the Five Elements? The Pranava is the very life of all the elements and so it is the life-breath of Prakriti itself. The roar of waters falling down a cliff, the beating of waves on a promontory of the shore, both repeat the Pranava only. The sound of inhaling and exhaling breath is itself the Pranava, is it not? Whether they know it or not, the heigh-ho of the men who carry along 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 Pranava. 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 Pranava of the breathing process is also the saviour from grief. It is meaningless to argue that some have the right to utter the Pranava and some have not. Those who do not breathe may not have the authority to utter it, but all who breathe are reciting it already in the process and so there is no sense in denying it to anyone. When Arjuna asked how one should remember the Lord at the point of death, do you not know the reply that Krishna gave? He said that he should recall to his mind the Pranava which is undifferentiated from Him.

- Such a Bhaktha will, He said, attain the highest goal. So everyone has the right to this great manthra, the Pranava.
- Q. How can the goal be reached through the Upasana of Pranava? How can the person who meditates become transformed into the thing meditated upon? Please make this unequalled manthra, and the way it helps us, clearer to me by means of easy illustrations.
- A. Very good. Pranava is the bow. The Atma is the arrow. Para Brahman is the target. So the Sadhaka must, like the practitioner of the art of archery, be unaffected by things that agitate the mind. He should pay one-pointed attention to the target; then the bowman is filled with the target; he becomes the thing meditated on. In the Kaivalyopanishad, the Mundakopanishad and in various parts of the Sruthi, the Pranava is extolled in various ways. Therefore, this Manthra which liberates man can be recited and meditated upon by all. All can practise the Pranava Upasana. You need have no doubts on this point.