

# THE MANTRA

## FOR CONTACTING THE DIVINE

A primer for the first time reader

By

N. Krishnaswamy

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## **PREFACE**

The world-wide search of Man for Truth, since the dawn of history, has followed two separate paths. These are identifiable broadly as the path of Reason and Science followed in the West, and the path of Intuition and Vedanta followed in the East. Is it possible that these two paths of the West and East must always diverge, or may at best remain parallel and never meet ? Or, could they converge and finally meet, as is now beginning to appear possible ?

There is perhaps an inevitability that the two paths shall meet. If we recognize that Reason and Intuition are both parts of the same human faculty of the Mind, then quite surely they must be intended to serve the same purpose. This could be a position we may take, whether or not we believe them to be a gift of the Divine for the purpose of understanding HIM and serving His purpose. One could also, if one is so inclined, argue for the greater power and reliability of Intuition without bringing the Divine into the argument.

But sceptic or ignorant as we humans are, belief and faith do not come easily. There was perhaps an early point of time, when all men, whether out of fear or instinct or even reason, believed in the Divine, though in a wide variety of names and forms. But soon enough, some sections of mankind, specially in the West, specially centred in Greece, started to gain more self-confidence in their faculty of reason and started to think that they could reason out the Truth in all its fullness. At first they opted to work out things through thought alone, but later they found greater confidence in figuring out the laws of Nature through demonstrable, repeatable and predictable physical experiment. They became thus firmly convinced that this approach alone could lead them to true understanding and this set them irrevocably on that path. Even though they knew that they had to start with an assumption or a hypothesis, which was surely nothing but a simple level of intuition, they took it for granted that intuition itself was a small part of reason. Western man then started to move out from the intellectual method of Philosophy to embrace external “fool-proof” methods of physical investigation of Science. The very word “Physics”, as the oldest discipline of Science, shows how much it is rooted in the physical !

The intuitive ideas of some of the early Greeks themselves, with great minds like Plotinus (204-270 AD) coming very close to Vedanta, were written off as Mysticism and never took root. It seems possible that the pervasive environment of socio-economic conflict in the West made for a greater emphasis on physical survival than on spiritual interests. The shift in the West was of course finally and firmly established by the phenomenal physical satisfactions and achievements in the field of Science and

Technology that simply transformed the face of human society. In the West's belief in the power of their own rationality, Intuition thus clearly took a back seat.

In contrast, Man in the East, specially in India, showed a marked preference for the Path of Intuition. For them interestingly, an understanding of the truths of Existence was not to be found only in the external world, but far more critically through the internal world of the Mind, the reaches of which were simply not limited to what the senses brought in from the external world. In the inner world of the Mind, the faculty of reason was greatly extended by faculties of discrimination, analysis and conceptualization, and by vast vistas of imagination, instinct, intuition, emotion and a higher consciousness. The Indian ancients explored and explained the outer world in the deeper perspectives of this inner world, with the uncompromising logic of Epistemology, the intuitive vision of Philosophy and the rigorous disciplines of Yoga. What emerged from their efforts were the phenomenal compilations of the Vedas, the Vedangas, the Puranas and the Itihasas set in a delectable language which was built on the most scientific linguistic principles. All these added up to a knowledge corpus that has commanded the awe and respect of the highest minds, of even Science, of modern times. There are indeed many findings of Vedanta that provide answers to many of the unresolved questions that persist today at the frontiers of Science.

Much as the spirit and teachings of the Indian ancients were set in a universal perspective, today's world is deeply divided by vast disparities in the human condition arising from the skewed socio-political systems that grew out of the materialist culture and thrust of technology that was spawned by Science in the West. If we are to cut across these divisions today we may need first to focus on the great commonality to be found in the thought and spirit of great minds of different cultures at different times of the world's history. It is in this context that it is important for us of today to recognize that the search for Truth remains the common goal of the method of Intuition of Eastern Spirituality and the method of Rationality of Western Science. It will therefore be of much interest, as indeed of importance, to the first time reader of today, conditioned as he is by the culture of Science, to first get a critical overview of the evolution of modern science, because it will show him convincingly how the findings of science today are inexorably leading to the threshold of same Intuitive findings of several thousand years ago by the Rishis of ancient India. Science today says that all Existence must rest on an Ultimate Law which the East has always referred to as an Ultimate Divine. Should the division of today's world into East and West, rest on two different words which mean the same thing ?

The over-arching reliance on Reason or Rationality in the West is an inheritance from some of the great minds of ancient Greece, of the centuries before, or early after the advent of the Christian era : personalities like, Homer, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle and Ptolemy. The early Greeks believed that human thought was enough to arrive at an understanding of the working of Nature, and that there was no need for physical experimentation or equipment for verification of its phenomena. Aristotle (384-322 BC) also corrected an old belief that the Earth was flat and provided good reasons to show that it was a sphere. But he went on to say that the Earth was the centre of the Universe and that the sun, moon and stars followed a circular course of movement around the Earth, the circle, of course, being considered the most perfect shape. Aristotle also thought the earth was stationary, and that a state of rest was the norm for everything, until acted on by an external force. These ideas were strongly endorsed and maintained for long by the Christian Church as being in accord with the Genesis of the Bible, and reflecting the perfection of God's creation. It was not until 1514 AD that a Polish priest, Copernicus (1473-1543), proposed (anonymously, for fear being punished as a heretic by the Church) that it was the sun that was at the Centre and the Earth, Moon and stars revolved around it. This view was largely ignored until 1609 when the Italian astronomer, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) proved it by observation with the new invention, the telescope. This was later confirmed by the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630). Open support spread thereafter for the validity of the Copernican theory. Kepler also proposed an elliptical rather than circular orbit for the bodies revolving around the sun. These facts only emphasize how Reason had to struggle in those times against the Church-enforced religious beliefs and how in any case, practical physical experiment could progress only through a slow and tortuous course of trial and error. At a basic level, the whole course of Science seemed to be defeated by its own methodology of investigation by physical experiment which had necessarily to address phenomena in small manageable segments. Addressing partial problems, could not but produce partial solutions, which threw up fresh problems in a never ending sequence.

The big movement forward of Science came with the work of Sir Isaac Newton ( 1643-1727 ) who provided a big advance in an understanding of the role of force, mass, motion, gravity and gravitation in the phenomena of Nature in the context of space and time. It paved the way for a clearer understanding of not only the motion of terrestrial but also the heavenly bodies, which could not only explain but also predict their behaviour with considerable accuracy. But his work also opened up a number of even more fundamental questions. The investigations of a stream of great scientists in subsequent centuries led a whole series of fundamental discoveries. The belief in indivisible atom propounded by Democritus (450 – 322 BC) ended with its breakup into a stream of

smaller and smaller particles with the discovery of the electron in 1897 by J.J.Thomson, the proton in 1919 by Rutherford, the neutron in 1938 by James Chadwick, and finally a vast array of sub-atomic particles, collectively called the hadrons. A point was reached in 1927 by Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) whose Principle of Uncertainty ended the existence of a boundary separating matter and energy, and indeed in a larger philosophical sense, the certainty of all name and form. The release of energy in packets or quanta was proved by Maxwell in 1900, followed later by a grand unity of electricity. light and all forms of energy falling into a common electro-magnetic spectrum. The constant speed of light established by Michelson and Morley led finally to Einstein's abolition of the concepts of absolute Space and Time, and the establishment of the oneness of all forms of mass and energy, all pointing to a grand unification of all the forces and fields controlling Nature. There was a strange convergence of Particle Physics and Astro Physics, where the sub-atomic particle was seen to carry the secret of the Creation of the Cosmos.

The Principle of Uncertainty or Indetermination propounded by Werner Heisenberg in 1927 marked a watershed in the philosophical evolution of modern Physics. Its finding was that the act of observation affected the process that was being observed, in a way that made the outcome of the process uncertain. In other words, there was a clear linkage between the observing subject and the observed object, that there was indeed no boundary between the subjective and objective worlds. Thus the electron or other sub-atomic particles presented a new mystery, whether they should be regarded as matter or energy. Investigation now clearly called for a new mind-set to study this area of physical process. The subject began to be referred to as "Atomystics", pejoratively suggesting an entry of the science of Physics into the unscientific area of Mysticism.

Faced with the emerging Oneness of the Universe, from the Infinitely Small to the Infinitely Large, Science is today virtually at the door step, but not quite within the sanctum of the Ultimate Reality. Science is halted here by the question : Are we at the door of another Relative Reality or an Inexplicable Infinity ? For Science, Infinity has always remained an inexplicable concept. For India's Vedanta it has been fully and finally explained as identical with the Ultimate Reality – something beyond the finite reach of Word and Reason, but within the infinite reach of Intuition. No event can better exemplify the convergence of Science and Vedanta than what happened on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1945, at the Alamogordo Desert, when Robert Openheimer was witnessing the first explosion of his creation, the atom bomb. Overawed by the stupendous brilliance that lit the entire sky, he involuntarily recited under his breath, the following lines :

**If the radiance of a ten thousand suns  
Were to burst into the sky  
That would perhaps be like  
The splendour of the Might One !**

**Openheimer was reciting these lines from the Bhagavad Gita (11-12) ! Was this, if a little irreverence is permitted, a case of the Devil quoting the Scriptures. Or more seriously, a case of one of the greatest scientists of the modern world paying tribute to the greatest Rishis of ancient India ? Or an obeisance of Rationality to Intuition ?**

**There has been no better and greater mind in modern times than Swami Vivekananda who articulated with such eloquent clarity the inevitability of Rationality of Science having to finally submit to the Intuition of Vedanta. In a brief life time of 32 years, he spanned the horizons of the West like a brilliant meteor for seven eventful years, to bring this message home to the Western world. Anticipating by half a century, the greatest scientists the world has seen in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in astonishing detail, he articulated the message of Vedanta in the language of Science. His was a new perspective of what has come to be described as Neo-Vedanta, much as the thought of Plato in the Western world, gave place to Neo-Platonism. One can do no better than present his message in the words of one of his own speeches in the course of those eventful years. These are extracted from a wonderful compilation of his speeches and writings presented in the book, "Modern Physics and Vedanta" by Swami Jitatmananda and which are reproduced in the Annexure of this book for their sheer value. One of Vivekananda's speeches delivered at Chicago in 1893 is reproduced here because of its direct relevance to the foregoing narrative.**

**Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as Science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress because it would reach the goal. Thus Chemistry could not progress further when it would discover one element from which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfil its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations. And the science of religion would become perfect when it would discover HIM, who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, one who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus it is through multiplicity and duality that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no further. This is the goal of all Science.**

**How is this perspective of Reason and Intuition relevant to Mantra, the theme of this book ? Simply this : The Mantra is one of the keys that open the doors of that wonderful thing called the Mind, that leads beyond the faculty of Reason into the faculty of Intuition and finally lets us come face to face with the Ultimate Reality**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Vedas are perhaps the only scriptures in the world that have their hymns addressed to the Divine in the unique form of the Mantra. The uniqueness lies in the Mantra being framed in a special language designed, not only for human-human, but also human-Divine communication. The Mantra is structured in verse, sentence, phrase, or presented just as a letter or a string of letters such as constitute the common language elements, and that are designed to facilitate normal human articulation and communication. These normal uses however, rely on the association of sounds with meanings that humans understand. But what if we want to talk to God ?. Our ancients prescribed that this process required not only purity of thought, feeling and intent on our part, but that these should be clothed in purity of word, in terms of purity of sound. They therefore refined the human language that then commonly prevailed, called Prakrit, and designed Sanskrit, a word that itself means something done to perfection. They then used this language to present to mankind, whatever they had realized as the realities and purposes of human existence. This became the word of the Veda.

But while the Veda could thus create awareness and a feeling for the Divine in the discerning higher seeker, that was not enough. There was need for widespread need for acceptance and practice of its teachings by the common man. These needs crystallized into a remarkable triad of concepts, the Mantra, Tantra and Yantra, that provided a convergence of method resting on faculties of the mind, the multifarious inner and outer activities of the body and their healthy interaction with the external world of objects. The Mantra met the needs of the seeker, while the Tantra and Yantra met the needs of the common man by providing a framework of physical activity of sacrifices and rituals and of worship with the aid of physical symbols. There was clearly a need to ensure that the Veda met the needs of everyone.

The Mantra provided the channel of communication for the common man to the Divine through use of its words and sounds, with faith but without necessarily understanding their meaning. For the higher seeker however, the words and sounds carried deeper meaning of enormous significance. For them the Mantra was a language of abstract sound, much like the language of Mathematics where symbols represented powerful factors, operators and operands that could produce a result and thereby represent or explain any of the phenomena of experience. The unity of matter and energy, for example, was expressed by Albert Einstein through the Mathematical equation  $e = mc^2$ . The highest minds of modern Physics are searching today for a fundamental unity that encompasses Mass, Energy, Space Time, and all that exists in what is conceived as a single

field. It may well take the ultimate form of a single simple equation somewhat like  $A + B = 1$ , where A is the observer and B is all that he observes , and they may both ultimately add up to 1, a number representing a single Ultimate Reality. It may be of some interest to the reader to know that this truth that we stated in the form of this equation was expressed differently by the ancient Rishis. Using Sanskrit words, they expressed it in the form “Aham Brahma Asmi” where Aham is “I”, represented by A, all that exists is represented by B, and Asmi is “AM”, which is represented by the symbol =, and Brahma is the Ultimate Single Reality, represented by the number 1.

An introduction to and understanding of the Mantra in both its linguistic and philosophical implications can best begin with the following verse from the Rig Veda that is the very source of the ancient Mantra corpus :

चत्वारि वाक्परिमिता पदानि तानि विदुर्ब्राह्मणा ये मनीषिणः ।

गुह्या त्रीणि निहिता नेङ्गन्ति तुरीयं वाचो मनुष्या वदन्ति ।। १-१६४-४५

catvāri vākparimitā padāni tāni vidurbrāhmaṇā yē manīṣiṇaḥ .

guhya trīṇi nihitā nēṅganti turīyaṃ vācō manuṣyā vadanti .. 1-164-45

Four are the definite grades of speech ; those Brahmanas who are wise know them ; three, deposited in secret, indicate no meaning ; men speak the fourth grade of speech.

In this ancient declaration, the Rishis clearly indicated that language had a popular usage level among the common people but also had three more esoteric levels of usage. These three were obviously set in a religious or spiritual context. and were therefore known only to the learned. These had their own letters, words, sounds meanings and rules, that admitted of connecting into higher levels of subtlety and power in the Mind that could ultimately connect to the Divine. Some details of these are referred to in later parts of this book. Secrecy of sounds, signs and symbols of course, can be found to occur in every spiritual or mystic tradition across the world's cultures.

For evolving Mantras, our ancients analyzed common speech by working backwards through its components, to discover their earlier sources in pure sound. They reasoned that all sounds emanated from energy and were designed for use as vehicles of meaning; and therefore that the true power of language lay in the power of its sounds. They reasoned that power or energy itself came from one ultimate source of energy or power, which manifested in a vast variety of forms. That

corresponded to the One Ultimate Power from which the vast plurality of name and form of all Existence originated. That ultimate Power is the Highest Unmanifest called the Nirguna Brahman. Its first Manifestation is called the Saguna Brahman, which in the form of Sound is called Sabda Brahman. The first primordial sound articulated by Sabda Brahman was considered to be "AUM" The Rishis traced the sounds of human language through what was conceived as a set of basic seed sounds called the Bija Aksharas till they finally reached the first primordial sound AUM.

Unfortunately the Bija Aksharas which figure individually in the Mantras appear not to have any obvious meaning except to those endowed with a higher perception. This opened to the Mantras to ridicule of the early Western colonists, as superstitious mumbo-jumbo. And the Western education that they introduced, with its over-arching emphasis on rationalism in the name of Science, unfortunately converted many unthinking Indians to their way of thinking, This is an influence that persists to this day. Luckily, among Westerners who came to India, were scholars of great perception and sensitivity who contributed substantially to contain the damage. One such person was a distinguished British scholar, Sir John Woodroffe ( 1865-1936 ). He was a Judge of the High Court of Calcutta (now Kolkata) but more importantly, he was a Sanskrit scholar of high attainments. He engaged in a deep study of the Vedic heritage with the spirit of a devotee that would put any Indian scholar to shame. This is what he says in his 1955 book, "The Garland of Letters" where he presented a perceptive study of the Mantra Sastra :

"... Mantra is, it is true, meaningless to those who do not know its meaning. But there are others who do, and to them it is not "superstition". It is because some English-educated Indians are as uninstructed in the matter as that rather common type of Westerner, to whose mental outlook and opinions, they mould their own, that it is possible to find a distinguished member of this class describing the Mantra as "meaningless jabber". Indian doctrines and practices have been so long and so greatly misrepresented by foreigners, that it has always seemed to me a pity, that those who are of this Punyabhumi, should through some misapprehension, malign without reason, anything which is their own ..... The Mantra Sastra so far from being considered, "meaningless superstition" or "jabber" is worthy of a close study, which when undertaken will disclose elements of value to minds free from superstition, of metaphysical bent and subtle seeing (Sukshmadarshin). A profound doctrine, ingeniously though guardedly set forth, is set forth in the Tantras of the Mantra Sastra and Agama. ....".

These words of wisdom coming from a great mind from a different culture, should tell us today, to look at the Mantra or indeed any of the great concepts of the ancient Indian heritage without bias of any kind, Western or Eastern. This small book is an attempt to address the point that much of the subject of the Mantra remains esoteric and in an idiom that is not easily accessible to first time reader of today. The riches of the world of Mantra should not be lost to this large audience of today. The subject is therefore presented in a context of example and analogy that is familiar to the generation of today, especially the younger generation, in the hope that they will, through their understanding, demolish the walls of bias that come in the way of a correct understanding of the Mantra. They need also to note that the that the materialistic rationality of modern Science has reached a point where it is now recognizing that the way forward lay in the concepts that were declared long ago by the intuitive wisdom of the Indian Vedanta. This perspective will be elaborated further in this book.

It would be appropriate to open the First Chapter of this book with the title of Sabda, or Sound as the first Manifestation of the Unman fest, symbolized by the first Mantra “AUM”, as presented in the image on front cover of the book. The narrative here is set in the awesome context of the Sabda as the first movement of Creation as it emerged from the Highest, Divine.

I must close here with a word of thanks to Rama Venkataraman, Alamelu Ramakrishnan and C.L.Ramakrishnan for their unstinting help with checking the draft of this book for errors and ommissions, where any that remain are, of course, entirely mine.

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## CHAPTER 1 : SABDA : SOUND

The ancient Rishis of India had a vast vision that saw the Finite Existence of the Manifested Universe with all its plurality as emerging from One Single Existence that was Infinite and Eternal. They set out their insights for the benefit of humanity in the *Vedas*. It is interesting to note that Western thought and later Western Science were never comfortable with the concept of Infinity as it did not conform to requirements of Science of being observable and measureable. It was tolerated and accommodated as a mathematical convenience. On the other hand, the Indian ancients simply accepted Infinity as the Sall-Existent and also Zero as the Non-Existent, or in other words, the Real and Unreal or the True and False respectively. They had a very realistic sense of what Infinity meant when they defined it as a quantity that no amount of delimitation could diminish. Their vision of Infinity was vividly expressed in the Shukla Yajur Veda, in the following description :

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।

पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ।।

ōm pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidaṁ pūrṇātpūrṇamudacyatē .

pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamēvāvaśiṣyatē ..

Om ! THAT is perfect. THIS too is perfect. From THAT is THIS born. Yet THAT remains undiminished.

In this description, THAT refers to the Infinite Existence and THIS to the Finite Existence. The Indian ancients had a sense not only for Infinity, for which they used the word Ananta, or endless, but also the concept of Zero or Void, for which they used the word Sunya. They had indeed, words for everything, whether factual or conceptual, suggesting the enormous power and potential for the Word, which was Sabda. This is a point that will be elaborated further later on. But the interesting point made here is that our finite delimitation of the Universe leaves the Infinite Divine unchanged

We can now come to the process of Creation. The Unmanifest or Brahman is an Infinite and Eternal State of Pure Consciousness, which is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent but without thought, movement or activity. It is like a vast lake of pure and tranquil water. A thought is like a pebble dropped into it causing an ever-widening and never-ending succession of ripples. Each ripple is transient in both time and space till the next ripple takes over. These ripples affect

only the surface, while the body of water below remains tranquil and unaffected. A thought, or desire or impulse is considered to appear in this Pure Consciousness as a first act, a first Cause. Like the pebble, this is the Divine impulse, called Ichha, that launches a never ending succession of ripples that constitute all of Creation. Let us see what the Rig Veda says :

Rig Veda : X - 129

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदाससीत् ।

सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन्हृदि प्रतीष्या कवयो मनीषा ॥ ४ ॥

*kāmastadagnē samavartatādhi manasō rētaḥ prathamam yadāśasīt*

*satō bandhumasati niravindanhr̥di pratīṣyā kavayō manīṣā ..*

In the beginning, desire, the first seed of mind, arose in That. Poet-seers, searching in their hearts with wisdom, found the bond of existence in non-existence.

This apparently simple verse has profound implications. Firstly, desire, a mere thought-impulse of the Divine, can create the vast plurality of all of existence in space and time from what was earlier an Unmanifest state. Secondly, the qualities of the Cause are invariably carried into the Effect. Some philosophies indeed assert that the Cause is itself the Effect. The germs of Consciousness, Knowledge and Power of the Divine, can therefore be seen to be present in man, as an end-product of Creation. They can be seen in the impulse to create that is found in all forms in the sentient world, in the form of sexual desire, that drives onward creation, proliferation and continuance of the species and their increasing involvement in worldly activities. At the same time Consciousness, Knowledge and Power also makes man aware of his divine roots. One facet of Power is Sound that is called Sabda. Sound as speech adds the word “God” to man’s vocabulary, for use when he is so inclined, or more often, when he is in dire need.



One integral aspect of the Supreme Divine, suffused with the same Consciousness, Knowledge and Power is the Divine Mother called Shakti. That both together constitute the One Ultimate Reality, is symbolized by the beautiful icon of Ardhanariswara, the Iswara form that is presented as half man, half woman, as seen in the image here.

And it is Shakti that, in response to that primordial thought-impulse of the Divine, becomes the Mother of all Creation and creates the Universe. She is also a personification of Sabda and under the name Vak, becomes the Goddess of Speech.

Listen to what the Rig Veda says in this regard :

Rig Veda : VIII-100-11

देवीं वाचमजनयन्त देवास्त्वां विश्वरूपाः पशवो वदन्ति ।

सा नो मन्द्रेषमूर्जं दुहाना धेनुर्वागस्मानुप सुष्टुतैतु ।।

dēvīm vācamajanayanta dēvāstvām viśvarūpā: paśavō vadanti .

sā nō mandrēṣamūrjaṁ duhānā dhenurvāgasmānupa suṣṭutaitu

The gods produced Vak, the goddess of speech; her do animals of every kind utter; may she, Vak, the joy giving cow, yielding meat and drink, and most worthily praised, come to us.

This hymn is very clear and explicit in the meaning that it conveys. We see a goddess named *Vak*, presiding over the faculty of speech, having a presence in and giving voice to all living beings. The cow figures here as a power to bring physical and psychological satisfaction, and *Vak* is likened to that power whose support is sought by the supplicant. Like the cow, the horse is another symbol, a symbol of energy, and cows and horses figure all over the *Rig Veda*. It would be a travesty of interpretation to say that its hymns are no more than a supplication of a primitive people for horses and cows which constituted wealth in ancient pastoral societies.

Incidentally the Vedic concept of Incarnation or the Avatar is not to be understood as referring to a sizeable presence of the Divine in a handful of evolved personalities. Its reference is to the presence of a spark of the Divine in everyone and everything that exists. We will now see the profundity of the words of the great Marathi Saint Tukaram (1608-1650) when he says : I went in search of God and could not find him. Then, at last, I discovered that I, the seeker was the sought. I was the God that I was seeking.

The widely accepted Kashmir Saiva tradition conceives of the existence of the world as emerging from 36 fundamental, elemental principles or categories, called *Tattvas*. These describe the emergence of the world from *Siva*, the Absolute, Unmanifest State, through progressive manifestation, from a spiritual state to the ultimate psychological and

physical entities that comprise worldly existence. This progression is from the most subtle to the most gross. Implicit in that outward path of Involution, is also the return inward path of Evolution, from the physical through the spiritual stages of return back to the Absolute state. This return process suggests that the ultimate purpose of existence is to return to Divine.

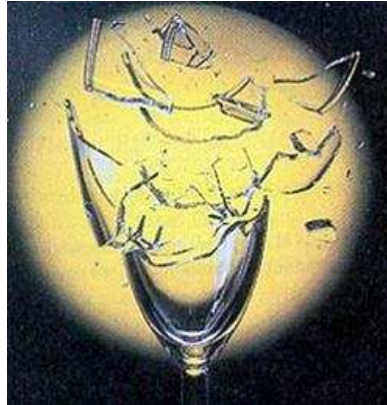
The Tattvas fall within the three broad categories listed below in the reverse order from the gross to the subtle :

- (a) The *asuddha* Tattvas (अशुद्ध) or Impure physical level, resting on the material, sensorial, the organs of action, the mind and the ego, the domain of objectivity and duality;
- (b) The *śuddhāśuddha* Tattvas, ( शुद्धाशुद्ध ) or Pure-Impure transitional level of the soul within limitations, the domain of knowledge; and
- (c) The *śuddha* Tattvas (शुद्ध) or Pure Tattvas (internal aspects of the Absolute) being the domain of [transcendental](#) unity and non-differentiation.

The reference to Sabda as one of the Tattvas has a special bearing on the identification of Sabda with Highest Divine under the name of Sabda Brahman. The concept was later developed as a Tattva under the name of Sabda Tattva, in the innovative formulations of Bhartrhari (4-5<sup>th</sup> Century) in what was perhaps the world's first complete philosophy of Language. In the ancient Indian tradition, there was always a schism between the Grammarians (Vaikyanikas) and the Philosophers (Darshanikas), though both groups remained loyal to the basic Vedic tradition. Bhartrhari belonged to the great Grammarian tradition of Panini and Patanjali but was one of those rare scholars of those times who straddled the field of philosophy as well. He was not so accepted by the Darshanikas till much later times when the philosophy of language emerged as a scholastic discipline and when the originality and merits of his contribution began to be recognized. Bhartrhari's contribution lay in his formulation that all meaning was an integral part of the Word, that is Sabda, which he equated to language. From this formulation which was very much in the domain of grammar and linguistics, he extrapolated Sabda as a unitary Principle, that he called Sabda Tattva. This Tattva had two inseparable dimensions, one the domain of speech activity, and the other, the power of conceptualization. Proceeding in the direction of linguistics, he went on then to say that without support through the word form of Name, no object could exist, simply because it was not identifiable. And proceeding in the direction of philosophy he said Sabda Tattva as an underlying Principle could then be related with the Sabda Brahman.



In this background we may now consider the structure, content and intent of the Mantra in greater detail. Let us first consider abstract Sound that does not contain the element of meaning and not yet therefore crystallized into the components of speech. We can readily see that even such sound in an abstract state can carry enormous power. Sound at a particular resonant frequency from a loudspeaker can become the vehicle for brute physical force and shatter a wine glass as seen in the picture below :



But gentler abstract forms of sound can also carry a lot of power of a different kind : as music, it can bring about mood changes of joy, sorrow, elation or depression. Of course, once meaning enters into sound as the word, then it acquires power of a totally different order. A pedagogue may incite a mob into fury, an eloquent speaker may reduce an audience to laughter or move it to tears, and a story teller may hold a group of children in thrall. With wireless making short work of time and distance, people throughout the world can today talk to each other in real time.

But what happens when the individual is alone and introspecting. Some people talk with themselves, but most get lost in thought. Does thought use a language or does it deal with meaning or concepts that are not yet clothed in words ? Does silence have a language ? Above all, what if he wants to talk to God. Of course he could still use his mother tongue or any other language on the fairly safe assumption that God knows all languages. It is here that the ancient Rishis felt that for the common man, talking with God should be as simple and easy as talking to a neighbour. However, a serious spiritual seeker of God needs special attitudes and a special effort built into a special language designed for that higher purpose. This language could, to make it easy, use the sounds, letters, words and meanings that are used by common people, but yet add a few more special ones and set them all in special rules of usage. This became the Mantra, largely comprizing the content of the Vedas. This was what made the Mantra usable by the common man, but understood only by the wise, as indicated in the Rig Veda verse cited earlier.

The structure, content and intent of the Mantra were arrived at through an insightful tracing of the course of development of human language right from its Divine source, the Sabda Brahman. The Rishis there sensed that Sabda evolved from its most subtle, abstract, primordial form through forms that became increasingly gross. The special sounds that they identified as the very first gross forms in this chain, were what they called the Bija Aksharas or seed letters from which all the later gross sounds of common language proliferated. The Rishis took particular care to relate each of these Aksharas to their antecedent subtle forms which were termed Devatas or the Deities or Powers that regulated their purpose and usage. The Consciousness, Knowledge, and Power of the Highest Divine has been, in smaller measure, transmitted or delegated to these Deities to enable them to manage the onward course of creation and also become conduits for two-way communication along this chain.

With this background of Sabda or Sound at its most subtle, spiritual levels we may now proceed in the next Chapter, to consider the more gross levels of sound, as they are articulated at its more familiar levels of common speech, before we go on to consider the more specialized form of the Mantra. We may appropriately begin with an overview of how speech in its common form of Prakrit that was used by the people, was refined to its perfect form of Sanskrit, for use of higher purposes of literature, knowledge and religion. Be it known that the word Sanskrit itself means “that which is made perfect”. We therefore turn our attention now to a consideration of Vak or Speech.

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## CHAPTER 2 : VAK : SPEECH

The ancient Rishis, steeped as they were in the perfection of the divine, had perfection as the hallmark of their treatment of Sound in the form of Speech and Language. The very word “Sanskrit” means that which is done to perfection. To represent and address the Divine as Sabda Brahman required nothing less than perfection in the language they employed and the design of every aspect of it : its structures of letters, words, sentences, and meaning. These features were implemented in uncompromising standards of articulation and memory training to ensure an uncompromising insistence on maintaining the Vedic texts in their pristine purity and sanctity. The formalizing of all these disciplines, which like the original texts remained for a long time in oral form, was left to later scholars of great erudition and integrity, and ultimately took form of the Siksha, Nirukta, Vyakarana and Chandas texts of the Vedangas, a word that appropriately means Limbs of the Vedas. The different principles underlying the generation and use of speech are covered by the Siksha Vedanga and these have been presented comprehensively in a chapter in the earlier book of this author on the Vedangas, and therefore much of that chapter is reproduced below.

The Shiksha Vedanga forms the traditional science of Phonology and Phonetics and is limited to the sound content of words. The content structure of sentences is covered by Vyakarana or Grammar. One of the first concerns of the ancient Vedic scholars was how the Vedas should be accurately recited, and to lay down rules that would ensure such accuracy for all time. The earliest teachings towards this objective were the Padapāthas, first attributed to Sakalya, a contemporary of Yagyavalkya, that great Rishi associated with the Yajur Veda. The Samhita texts (the main authoritative parts) of the Vedas had basic word components joined into compound words by systematic rules of Sandhi, meaning joining, to enable continuous, euphonic rendering of the texts. An approximate analogy to the concept of Sandhi, in the context of English is the distinction between saying “a banana” and “an apple”, where the change of the indefinite article “a” to “an” serves a euphonic rendering. The first step was the Padapātha to establish a wider understanding of the Samhita text of the Vedas, by splitting each composite word into its components. The Padapātha then led to the compilation of the Pratishakyas which described the correct pronunciation and intonation of Sanskrit speech and also the rules of sandhi or euphonic combination of words. The Pratishakyas were specific to the Shakhas or schools that were established throughout the country for the preservation and dissemination of the Vedas and form part of the corpus of Shiksha.

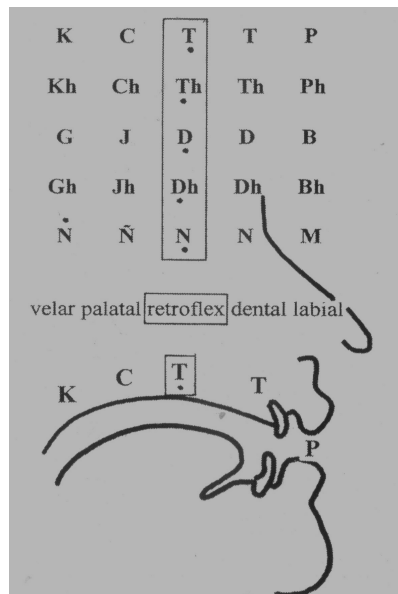
Five Pratishakyas are extant today. The Pratishakya texts are composed in the form of metric verse, or the more condensed form of Sutras. They present the basic structure of Sanskrit by breaking up its words into stems, prefixes and suffixes as aids to their correct pronunciation. They then prescribe different styles of recitation, involving a regulated, repetitive patterned switching of syllables or words of a text as aids for memorizing and correctly articulating the slokas. This led to rules of Sandhi, of how syllable or word sequences could be joined during articulation.

At a level of greater structural detail, the alphabet got developed in terms of the syllable called the Akshara, or “imperishable” unit of sound, comprised of the Vyanjana or consonant and the Svvara or vowel. One of the most remarkable features here was the presentation of the main Consonants in the Varga structure, a 5 x 5 matrix, as shown below. What is interesting is that the pattern of stresses in pronunciation of the letters remains uniform when pronounced within rows and within the columns of the matrix.

ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa
ta	tha	da	dha	na
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma

What is more interesting is that these five groups appear in the same order in which the sounds and their shapes and stresses are generated as they emerge in the vocal passage, as seen in the diagram below, starting with the throat, and through the palate, tongue, and teeth and ending at the lips. This is why they are referred to as gutturals, cerebrals, palatals, dentals and labials respectively. But what is truly remarkable is that these concepts which are accepted as standards of Phonology today in modern

linguistics, appeared for the first time nearly 3000 years ago in the Shiksha texts of the Vedic corpus in India.



In this matrix, the stress difference between sounds is preserved whether you recite them in the horizontal or vertical order. These letters were extended and completed with fricatives and sibilants, semi-vowels, and vowels, and eventually codified into the Brahmi alphabet, which is one of the most systematic approaches of mapping sound to writing.

Svara akṣaras are also known as prāṇa akṣara i.e. they are what impart life as sound to speech. Vyañjana is also known as Prāṇi akshara i.e., they are like a body to which the Svara imparts life. We find a corresponding notation in the Tamil alphabet with Uyir ezhutthu and Mey ezhutthu, meaning letters bearing life and a body respectively. It is only when the consonant is joined by a vowel, when the body is joined by life, that articulation becomes possible

**Modes of recitation :** We are now in a position to consider the methods of recitation and memorizing the texts. Students are first taught the Samhita pātha, that is the text with Sandhi applied. Other pāthas include vakya, pada, krama, jata, mala, sikha, rekha, dhvaja, danda, ratha, ghana and these could follow the Padāpatha. A pāthin is a scholar who has mastered the patha. Thus, a ghanapaathin (or ghanapaati in Telugu) has learnt the chanting of the scripture up to the advanced stage called ghana. Ghanapathins chant the ghana by intoning a few words of a mantra in different ways, back and forth. That these methods have been effective, is testified to by the preservation of the most ancient Indian religious text, the Ṛgveda, as a single text, without any variant readings.

The insistence on preserving pronunciation and accent as accurately as possible is related to the belief that the potency of the mantras lies in their sound when pronounced correctly. Portions of the Vedantic literature elucidate the use of sound as a spiritual tool. They assert that the entire cosmic creation began with sound: "By His utterance came the universe." (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.2.4). The Vedānta-sūtras add that ultimate liberation comes from sound as well (anavrittih shabdāt). Primal sound is referred to as Shabda Brahman - "God as word". Closely related to this is the concept of Nada Brahman - "God as sound". Nada, a Sanskrit word meaning "sound", is related to the term nadī, "river", figuratively denoting the stream of consciousness - a concept that goes back to the Rīg Veda. Thus, the relationship between sound and consciousness has long been recorded in India's ancient literature. Vedic texts, in fact, describe sound as the pre-eminent means for attaining higher, spiritual consciousness. Mantras, or sacred sounds, are used to pierce through sensual, mental and intellectual levels of existence (all lower strata of consciousness) for the purpose of purification and reach into the spiritual level for enlightenment. Thus when the disciplines of the Vedāngas set out to explain the organic linkage between the Prana or divine energy that initiates life, and its onward emergence through thought and speech into meaning, clearly they enable us to trace this linkage back through this chain and link us to the divine source. This is clearly what Vedānta-sūtra 4.22 means when it says "By sound vibration one becomes liberated". Modern practitioners, like Hans Jenny have claimed, to have demonstrated by experiments that the sounds of Sanskrit phonemes (aksharas) have an effect on the mind, intellect, and auditory nerves of those who chant and hear them.

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The great Sanskrit grammarian Panini (c. 520–460 BC) in his *Aṣṭadhyāyī*, presented the processes of phonology, morphology and syntax, and laid down the basis for centuries of commentaries and expositions by Sanskrit grammarians who followed. Pāṇini's approach was amazingly formal; his production rules for deriving complex structures and sentences represent resemble those of modern computer languages. Many of the developments in Indian Mathematics, especially the place value notation system may have originated from Pāṇinian analysis. Panini's grammar consists of four parts:

Śivasūtra: phonology (notations for phonemes specified in 14 lines)

*Aṣṭadhyāyī*: morphology (construction rules for complexes)

Dhātupāṭha: list of roots (classes of verbal roots)

Gaṇapāṭha: lists classes of primitive nominal stems

In the Siva Sutras, Panini discusses something like the concepts of the phoneme, the morpheme and the root. The Siva Sutras describe a phonemic notational system in the opening part of the *Aṣṭadhyāyī*. The notational system introduces different clusters of phonemes that serve special roles in the morphology of Sanskrit, and are referred to throughout the text. Panini's grammar of Sanskrit had a significant influence on Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern structuralism, who was a professor of Sanskrit. The Polish scholar Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, (together with his former student Mikołaj Kruszewski) coined the word 'phoneme' in 1876, and his work, though often unacknowledged, is considered to be the starting point of modern phonology. He worked not only on the theory of the phoneme but also on phonetic alternations (i.e., what is now called allophony and morphophonology). His influence on Ferdinand de Saussure was also significant.

One ancient story that is relevant here is that the Lord Siva produced 14 sound sequences from the Damaru in the course of his Cosmic Dance. These sounds formed the foundations for later developments of all beats of dance, all notes of music and all phonemes of speech. It is said that these sounds appeared in Panini's mind and inspired him to set them down as the Siva Sutras at the head of his great work, the *Ashtadhyayi*.

Here is a sampling of a few verses quoted from the verses of Panini's *Shiksha* that illustrates the fundamental levels at which the subject was treated by him :

---

अथ शिक्षां प्रवक्ष्यामि पाणिनीयां मतं यथा

शास्त्रानुपूर्व्यं तद्विद्याद्यथीक्तं लोकवेदयोः १

Now, I shall give out the Siksha according to the views of Panini. In pursuance of the traditional lore, one should learn it with reference to the popular and the Vedic languages.

त्रिषष्टिश्चतुःषष्टिर्वा वर्णाः सम्भवतो मताः

प्राकृते संस्कृते चापि स्वयं प्रोक्ताः स्वयम्भुवा ३

That speech-sounds in Prakrit and Sanskrit are sixty three or sixty four, are said to have been given by Brahman (Svayambhu) himself

सोदीर्णो मूर्ध्यभिहतो वक्त्रमपाद्य मारुतः

रर्णाञ्जनयते तेषां विभागः पञ्चधा स्मृतः ९

स्वरतः काललतः स्थानात्प्रयत्नानुप्रदानतः

इति वर्णविदः प्राहुर्निपुणं तं निबोधत १०

(The breath) is sent upwards and is checked by the roof of the mouth, attains to the mouth and produces speech-sounds (varnas) which have a five-fold classification, according to their pitch, quantity, place of articulation, the primary effort and the secondary effort. So said those who were versed in (pronouncing) speech-sounds. Learn this carefully.

उदात्तश्चानुदात्तश्च स्वरितश्च स्वरात्रयः

ह्रस्वो दीर्घः प्लुत इति कालतो नियमा अचि ११

There are three kinds of (pitch) accent : udātta, anudātta and svarita. Among vowels short, long and pluta varieties are distinguished by their time of articulation.

उदात्ते निषादगान्धारावनुदात्त ऋषभधैवतौ

स्वरितप्रभवा ह्येते षडङ्गमध्यमपञ्चमाः १२

Of the seven musical notes, nishāda and gandhāra can arise in the high pitch (udātta), rishabha and daivata in the low pitch (anudātta) while shadja, madhyama and panchama have their source in the medium pitch (svarita). (This is the basis of the sing-song modulation seen in the recitation of the Mantras)

अष्टौ स्थानानि वर्णानामुरः कण्ठः शिरस्ता

जिह्वामूलं च दन्ताश्च नासिकोष्ठौ च तालु उ च १३

The speech-sounds have eight places (of articulation) : chest, throat, roof of mouth (literally, head), root of the tongue, teeth, nostril, lips and palate.

शङ्करः शाङ्करीं प्रादाद्याक्षीपुत्राय धीमते

वाङ्मयेभ्यः समाहृत्य देवीं वाचमितिइ स्थितः ५६

Drawing the divine words from the entire domain of speech (vanmaya) Sankara gave this, his science of speech (Sankarim) to the wise son of Dakshi. This is its basis.

The above account is but a small part of Panini's great work, the Ashtadhyayi which goes on to summarizing the rules of Sanskrit Grammar in nearly 4000 Sutras in an awesome structure of phenomenal content in astonishing brevity. These features led the greatest of modern linguists like Bloomfield and Naom Chomsky to declare him to the world's first and greatest Grammarian.

It is within this awesome perspective of how the Sanskrit language was perfected that we may perceive how it was used to construct the Mantra corpus of the Vedas and get some insight into the heights of intuitive effort that went into their composition. With this, we may now proceed to consider the context of how we got our first and foremost Mantra, the Pranava, AUM !

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## CHAPTER 3 : AUM : THE FIRST MANTRA

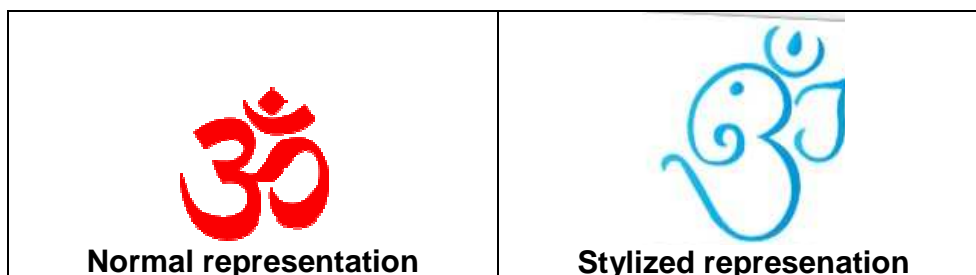
We have seen in the last Chapter how Sound was structured to provide speech. Though speech was designed for communication among humans themselves, the Rishis also realized that it should also serve to elevate the human to the level of the Divine through communication with the Divine. We have seen Vedic references to cosmic creation beginning with sound, and that sound could be a spiritual tool to lead to liberation. We have seen that sacred sounds structured as the Mantra could be used to pierce through sensual, [mental](#) and [intellectual](#) levels of existence (all lower strata of consciousness) for the purpose of [purification](#) and reach into the spiritual level for enlightenment. The Rishis found the organic linkage between the Prana or divine energy that initiates life, and its onward emergence through thought and speech into meaning. We have seen how this enabled them to trace this linkage back through this chain and identify those special basic sounds from which the sounds of common language originated, and which they called the Bija Aksharas, from where the onward backward linkages ultimately led to AUM as the first Mantra sound that best represented the Ultimate Divine. The Bija Aksharas became cornerstones of the later Mantras.

The Omkara or AUM is the sound representation of the ultimate reality Brahman. This is also known as Brahmakshara (vide Jadabharata Upakhyana in the Bhagavata Purana). Those in the stage of sanyasa have no duties to perform but are enjoined to meditate on this mantra. The Upanishads and Gita thus declare :

ॐ इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म ।

AUM is the single sound representing Brahman.

There are various interpretations as to the symbolic importance of AUM. The graphic representation is as below :



The three Devanagari letters corresponding to A, U and M are themselves seen merged in this representation. Alongside is another representation akin to the image of Ganapati. It is also considered as representing the Trinity of the Hindu pantheon. The intonation of AUM has to be according to the prescribed time measure, with a wave like raising and lowering the voice.

The first sound when the mouth was opened became quite naturally, the sound of the letter A or its equivalent in all languages. As the mouth started closing, the sound morphed through the stages of A and U, and when the mouth was closed with the sound continuing, became the hum of the silent M, thus giving AUM. And in a state of tranquility, both within and without, if the individual kept articulating or hearing this sound, it gave him a sense of having made a resonant contact with the Divine. Thus it was that every form of prayer began and ended with this sound, making it a virtual cornerstone of all devotional activity.

The Upanishads give it pride of place as the highest Mantra. The Mandukya Upanishad is wholly devoted to elaborating the importance of AUM. It opens with the declaration :

ओमित्येतदक्षरमिदं सर्वं , तस्योपव्याख्यानं , भूतं भवद्भविष्यदिति

सर्वमोङ्कार एव यच्चान्यत् त्रिकलातीतं तदप्योङ्कार एव / 1 /

This entire world is comprised of the sound AUM. This sound embraces the past, the present and the future and truly AUM is beyond all time.

This suggests that Energy represented by Sound is the ultimate eternal entity constituting all that exists, and to us, it is symbolized by the sound AUM.

**The Taittiriya Upanishad says :**

ओमिति ब्रह्म । ओमितीदग् सर्वम् । ओमित्येतदनुकृतिर्हस्म वा  
अप्योश्रावयेत्या श्रावयन्ति । ओमिति सामानि गायन्ति ।  
ओग्ं शोमिति शस्त्राणि शग्ंसन्ति । ओमित्यध्वर्युः प्रतिगरं  
प्रतिगृणाति । ओमिति ब्रह्मा प्रसौति । ओमित्यग्निहोत्रमनुजानाति  
ओमिति ब्राह्मणः प्रवक्ष्यन्नाह ब्रह्मोपाप्रवानीति । ब्रह्मैवोपाप्नोति  
। इति अष्टमोऽनुवाकः ।।

One should contemplate thus : Om is Brahman, and all the universe, perceived or imagined is Om. The entire hierarchy of priests at the sacrifice initiate their respective roles by or responding with reciting 'AUM', starting with the Adhvaryu or the supervising priest, the Udgatr who chants the hymns of the Sama Veda, the Hotr priests who recite the Rig Veda, and finally the Brahmana who prays to attain Brahman. Thus by performance in unison alone is Brahman attained.

**The Chandogya Upanishad says :**

ओमित्येतदक्षरमुद्गीथमुपासीत । ओमिति ह्युद्गायति तस्योपव्याख्यानम्- । १ ।

1. One should meditate on the syllable AUM, the Udgitha, for one sings the Udgitha beginning with AUM. Of this, the explanation follows.

(contd)

एषां भूतानां पृथिवी रसः पृथिव्या आपो रसः । अपामोषधयो रसः

ओषधीनां रुषो रसः पुरुषस्य वाग्रसो वाच ऋग्रस ऋचः साम रसः साम्र

उद्गीथो रसः । २ ।

2. The essence of all these beings is the earth. The essence of the earth is water. The essence of water is vegetation. The essence of vegetation is man. The essence of man is speech. The essence of speech is Rk. The essence of Rk is Saman. The essence of Saman is Udgitha.

स एष रसाना! रसतमः परमः पराध्योऽष्टमो यदुद्गीथः । ३ ।

3. The syllable Om which is called Udgitha is the quintessence of the essences, the supreme, deserving the highest place and the eighth.

The Katha Upanishad says :

सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति तपाग्सि सर्वाणि च यद्वदन्ति ,  
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत्ते पदं सङ्गहेण ब्रवीम्योमित्येतत् 1-2-15

That which is proclaimed by all the scriptures, which is said to be the end effect of all rituals and for which enquiry into the ultimate reality is undertaken, is “AUM” of which I shall tell you briefly.

And finally the Bhagavad Gita adds :

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ,  
यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ,, 13 ,,

He who leaves the body and departs uttering the single syllable, one indestructible Brahman, OM, with his mind on Me reaches the supreme goal. (13)

With this starting single syllable Mantra we can now proceed to the next great Mantra, which in a sense, provides the Bija Akshara foundation on which all other Mantras rest. This is the Panchadasakshari Mantra composed entirely of the Bija Aksharas, which provided virtually the foundation on which all Mantras rested. This Mantra has special significance in the worship of Lalitha Devi, the Universal Mother. Its text is reproduced below, and the reader may find it is interestingly poetic or melodic, but forbiddingly esoteric. It would indeed be so to all but the initiate. It is considered a holy mantra of enormous power, a power that clearly derives from the hold its inner meaning exercises on the devotee :

क ए ई ल ह्रीं । ka ē ī la hrīm̐ .

ह स क ह ल ह्रीं । ha sa ka ha la hrīm̐.

स क ल ह्रीं । sa ka la hrīm̐ .

The Panchadsakshari Mantra, as its name indicates, has its 15 letters distributed over three lines or sections, which are respectively called the Vagbhava Kuta, the Kamaraja Kuta and the Shakthi Kuta. When a sixteenth letter which is implicit in this Mantra is indicated explicitly, the Mantra is referred to as the Shodashakshari. The 15 (or 16) component letters and their three groupings carry a multi-faceted symbolism.

The three groups each have an identifying letter ( ऐं ह्रीं सौः ) and these refer to the face, the torso and lower part of the body of the Devi, whose image is reproduced below to indicate that images like this greatly intensify the faith that give Mantras their power and reach.



**Specific Names in the Lalitha Sahasranama refer to corresponding Chakras or vital energy centres of the human body and to locations as graphically represented in the Sri Chakra Yantra that is special to worship of Lalitha Devi. The Mantra thereby establishes what might be called a living triple linkage between the Devi, the Sri Chakra and the devotee, reflected in Her three names : Mahamantra, Mahatantra and Mahayantra. This three-way linkage is discussed in a later Chapter.**

**The first Mantra, AUM that we have discussed here is a pure Mantra, comprised of the pure sound of a single syllable. We have also considered here the Panchdasakshari Mantra that presents the Bija Aksharas which are critical elements in all Mantras. All these are sounds where meanings are not apparent, but are deeply embedded in their power and role as communication channels through which we can connect at the spiritual level to the Divine. We may now therefore proceed to consider a Mantra, next in importance only to AUM and the Panchadasakshari. The next Mantra bears a unique combination of both common and esoteric meaning, and also carries the unique appeal of being both a Mantra and an Upasana, accessible equally to the common man and the higher seeker. This is the Gayathri Mantra and to this we shall now turn.**

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## **CHAPTER 4 – THE GAYATHRI THE MANTRA FOR ALL**

Next to AUM, the Gayathri Mantra is perhaps the most popular of all Mantras. It's sanctity comes from the Veda declaration of it to be the Mother of the Vedas. Where many Mantras have a higher but not simpler meaning, the popularity of the Gayathri comes from the fact that it presents both higher meaning for the higher seeker and simpler meaning for the common man. Also, the Gayathri is designed as both a Mantra and an Upasana or Worship reflecting the care the ancient Rishis that its benefit should be for all without distinction of their intellectual levels. Upasana or Worship itself rests on a simpler level of Japa, or meditative repetition which reaches down the simplest level of the common man.

Let us now begin with the question of what the word Gayathri stands for. The word represents three entities : First, the Goddess who personifies the power of this Mantra; second, the Meter in which the Mantra is composed; and thirdly, the text and meaning of the Mantra itself . But first let us recall the basic tenets of the ancient philosophy from which these concepts spring. The Ultimate Divine in which Consciousness and its expression as Power exist, is a single Unmanifest Reality is called the Nirguna Brahman. When the thought arises in this Consciousness, "I am One. May I become Many", this becomes the first impulse, the First Cause of all Creation. The first Manifestation then is the Saguna Brahman, along with its first differentiation into its two aspects, the Consciousness as Siva and its Power as Sakthi. Sakthi then proliferates into Powers with corresponding Functions to handle the onward tasks of creation of the vast multiplicities at different levels of Creation. The combination of each Power and Function also carries a component of the Consciousness. The earliest of each such combination has a divine status personified as a Devata or Devi. The process carries down to the level of the individual who is endowed with a soul with these components of consciousness, power and function, though circumscribed by the gross physical form in which they are encased. This process of limitation may be regarded as what is referred to as Maya, something that obscures and limits the free play of the higher sources from which these components of the individual are derived. Maya is simply an incapacity of the partial to perceive the whole and to be caught in a duality of all perception and experience that characterizes all of human life. The progress of Science itself is indeed such a progression from a partial truth to a larger truth and can be considered as illustrative of the play of Maya !

The whole process of existence was envisaged by the ancients as proceeding in two opposite directions. The first is the outward path of Pravritti, or involution, a progression from subtle to gross form and progressive involvement of the individual in matter. The second is the return inward path of Nivritti, a progressive evolution from the gross to the subtle, a return of the individual from his physical existence to his divine roots of pure consciousness. Gayathri then is the Devi form of Sakthi, who guides the involution and evolution of the individual in whom the course of consciousness, power and function epitomizes the outward path of the One becoming Many and the return inward path of the Many becoming One.

Gayathri as Meter provides the metric structure into which the words of the Mantra are built. Meter and poetic structure provide the highest form of brevity and aesthetics that articulation can take, and poetry was therefore the preferred medium of the ancient Rishis in which to set the Vedas. The Rishis saw themselves as poets, and these features can easily be recognized as a common characteristic across all cultures. Meter simply arranges lines of poetry on a count of syllables that is perhaps designed to conform to the respiratory rhythm. Breathing process was itself a matter to which the Indian ancients paid considerable scientific attention for its role in life processes.

We now come to the text of the Gayathri Mantra itself. It is set in the Gayathri meter consisting of 24 syllables. It is said to be the highest of all incantations :

न गायत्र्यात् परो मन्त्रः, न मातुः परं दैवतं ।

The count of 24 syllables of the meter is obtained with one of the words spelt “Vareniyam” instead of “Varenyam” which would otherwise make for a count of 23.

In translation, Gayathri bears the meaning गायन्तं त्रायति – that which protects the chanter. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, however, gives a deeper meaning :

गायान् त्रायति तस्मात् गायत्री, गायान् वै प्राणाः ।

Here “gayan” refers to the chant sustaining the five vital airs or energies of the body supporting the biological functions of breathing, grasping, moving, ingesting and eliminating.

The Upanayana ceremony, or Vedic initiation of boys, is known as Brahmapadesa, or the teaching of Brahman. and the Gayathri mantra is



therefore said to constitute the Brahmopadesa.

The Vedic approach to prayer proceeds from a deep understanding of human psychology, where it posits a convergence of thought, word and action. When these three components do not act in concert, we have the beginnings of dishonest or thoughtless speech and action. Therefore the Vedic prescription for prayer rests squarely on such a convergence, which implies that the involvement in prayer must be total. The exceptional person can, of course, concentrate his mind on the spirit of the prayer, and may have no need for the word, gesture or posture components. But for the common individual, whose mind is given to wandering, the word, gesture and posture are essential, because they compel the attention of the mind. Physical offering of water, a leaf, a flower or a fruit to the deity of one's choice, while chanting the words that articulate the spirit of the offering, are thus great aids to make the prayer complete. This, says Krishna in the Gita (IX-26), is what makes the prayer acceptable to God.

Every Vedic prayer or ritual rests on this meticulous design. This presentation of the Gayathri Mantra provides an admirable illustration of this approach and spirit of the Vedas. This Mantra originates in the Rig Veda (III-62.10) and is referred to with great reverence in the Upanishads and many other works. It is indeed considered to be the most sacred and most significant prayer of the Vedas, and is, for this reason, embedded in the daily prayer, called the Sandhya-vandana, or more correctly, the Sandhya Upasana. The real name of the Gayathri Mantra is "Savitri Mantra" because it is addressed to Savitr, the Sun, the source of all life on earth, and therefore considered a symbol of that Ultimate Reality from which all existence emerges. The Mantra is comprised of four lines , the first of which reads :

ॐ भूः

aum bhū:

ॐ भुवः

aum bhuvah

ॐ सुवः

aum suvah

The word AUM is of course, regarded as the most sacred and the most significant word in the Vedas, just as the Gayathri is regarded as their most sacred and significant prayer. The word AUM represents Brahman, the Ultimate Reality from which emerges the Manifested Universe. The words Bhuh, Bhuvah and Suvah are the three levels of the Universe : the Earth of the humans, the Inter-space of the spirits and the Heaven of the gods. These three levels are also considered to represent the physical, the psychic and the divine levels of Human Existence. By this opening invocation the individual proclaims his being part of the Manifested Universe and the Unmanifested Reality beyond.

**The next three lines of the Gayathri Mantra are :**

तत् सवितुः वरेण्यम्

tat savituh: varēṇyam

भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि

bhargō dēvasya dhīmahi

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्

dhiyō yō naḥ pracōdayāt

**These lines pray that Savitr, the Sun that symbolizes the Ultimate Reality, should, with his divine effulgence, enlighten our intellect to realize the Ultimate Truth.**

**Freely translated, this mantra says :**

**We meditate upon that worshipful effulgence of Lord Sun. May He inspire our intellect (in the right direction).**

**Use of the word “naḥ” may be specially noted. It means “we”, and being in the plural form of the First Person, it indicates that the prayer is not for oneself, but on behalf of all. This and the other words of the prayer can thus be seen to have a universality that can appeal to anyone of any religious persuasion. Also, the Vedas explicitly state that the knowledge they contain is to be imparted to everyone without distinction of sex, caste, creed or race. (Sukla Yajur Veda XXVI - 2)**

**This presentation of the Gayathri Mantra should be of help to those who wish to adopt it for recitation with a full knowledge of its letter and spirit. Others should be at least persuaded that behind this prayer, as indeed behind the rituals of India, lie a world of depth and meaning, that is not to be easily brushed aside. We may now proceed to consider a few more Mantras in the next Chapter**

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## CHAPTER 5 – SOME MORE MANTRAS

After the Pranava or AUM and the Gayathri, a brief reference to some more Mantras in widespread everyday usage of the common people, addressed to the important deities of the Hindu Pantheon would be appropriate.

### GANESH :



Ganesh – traditional image



Ganesh – stylized in art

On Lord Ganesha, the following Vedic prayer is considered auspicious :

गणानां त्वा गणपतिं हवामहे कविकवीनां उपमस्रवस्तमम् ।

ज्येष्ठ राजं ब्रह्मणां ब्रह्मणस्पत आनश्रुण्वन् ऊतिभिः श्रीतसाधनम् ॥

The curved trunk of Lord Ganesha is described as the symbol of Omkara (AUM) by Muthuswami Dikshitar in his song composition

**pranava svarupa vakra tundam**

## DURGA :



For Devi Upasana, the Devi Mahatmaya of the Markandeya Purana, also known as Durga Saptasati is chanted. Seven of this collection of 700 slokas, are known as 'sapta sloki'. Among these there is an all-embracing verse, which runs as follows:-

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु सर्व रूपेण संस्थिता ।

नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ।।

I bow down again and again to that Goddess who manifests Herself as the inner core of all the forms seen in the Universe.

## SIVA



To propitiate Lord Siva, the Maha Mrtyunjaya Mantra, occurring in the Sri Rudra Prasnam, reproduced below is chanted.

त्र्यंबकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिं वर्धनं

उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनात् मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ।

Freely translated, it runs: - I worship the three-eyed, fragrant (Lord Siva), for enhancing my well- being and to release me from all bondage, caused by ignorance and to fall apart from bondage, just as a fruit when ripe, gets automatically detached and falls to the ground. This Mantra is also chanted

when one applies the sacred ash (vibhuti) on one's body. A short mantra addressed to Siva is the Panchakshari (of five letters) is (ॐ) नमः शिवाय

## NARAYANA



The Dvaadasakshari mantra or twelve letter mantra on Lord Narayana was advised by the divine sage Narada to Dhruva, when he set out for penance :

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय (Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya)

For propitiating Lord Narayana, a short form of the mantra is

ॐ नमो नारायणाय (Om Namō Narayana)

If नारायणाय or "narayanaaya" alone is recited it is called the panchakshari or five-letter mantra.

It is interesting to note here that Saint Tyagaraja, in his song composition "Evarani" says that he salutes that person who has coined the name "rama" by combining the two jeevaksharas, 'ra' and 'ma' taken from the Mahamantras Nama Sivaya and Namō Narayana. If these two letters are taken away from these maha mantras, what is left will be "na ayanaya" (not leading to moksha) and "na sivaya" (not for auspiciousness). The name "rama" is also known as "taraka mantra". The word "taraka" means "the one that helps you to ford a water body". Existence or Samsara is considered to be an ocean and this name is a boat that helps the individual to cross this ocean.

## ANJANEYA :



Anjaneya



Anjaneya (in art)

For invoking Anjaneya, the mantra is as follows :

असाध्यस्साधक स्वामिन् असाध्यं तव किं वद ।

रामदूत कृपा सिन्धो मत्कार्यं साधय प्रभो ।।

O! One who accomplished the impossible! One who is an ocean of mercy!  
Messenger of Lord Rama! What is unattainable to you?  
May you grant my needs.

The Mantra, however well conceived or described or prescribed still left the common man at some disadvantage. While he could vaguely visualize a divine to whom a Mantra was addressed, it seemed to lack the impact of something he could see or feel physically. There appeared to be a need for forms of worship which involved physical activity on his part and physical objects that concretized whatever his mind wanted to grasp. . The association of physical activities and objects with the Mantra would therefore give a fullness to worship which was more deeply satisfying. This need evolved into ritualistic worship of images, whether at home or in a temple. This need found perfection in the Vedic concept of the Mantra, Tantra and Mantra triad and its establishment in the most pervasive practices of worship which are perhaps the most distinctive feature in the religious culture of India. We therefore proceed from here to a consideration of the Mantra, Tantra and Mantra.

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## CHAPTER 6 : MANTRA-YANTRA-TANTRA

Symbols provide the most concrete ways of representing any abstract concept or activity for which names or words are not available. They are therefore a great way of representing the many abstractions that engage the mind. The symbol itself can be a letter, word, sound, image or a gesture or posture or any other action. A symbol can be used to refer to some aspect of the Divine or indeed as a means of communication with the Divine. Symbols are therefore extensively used in the practices of all religions, like, for instance the rosary. The rosary in our hands helps to keep a count of repetitions of a prayer. In the hand of Brahma the Creator it symbolizes his meditative activity. The Crescent Moon that Siva wears in his hair, stands for Periodicity and Time. The Conch in Vishnu's hand stands for the power of Sound and Communication.

Three of the names of the Universal Mother in the Lalitha Sahasranama are Mahamantra, Mahatantra and Mahayantra. These names are related to the triad of the Mantra, Tantra and Yantra symbols. The Mantra is Sound, the Yantra is the Object and Tantra is Human Activity symbolized in different forms in different modes of Worship. This triad binds Mind, Sound and Object, or at another level, God, Man, and the World. The three concepts merge and get to be personified in the form of the Divine Mother, emphasizing that all Name and Form of all of Existence, emerge from and merge back into One Ultimate Reality.

We may begin a consideration of the multifaceted symbolism that is embraced by the Sri Chakra, considered the highest form of the Yantra that is used in the worship of the Divine Mother.



**THE SRI CHAKRA  
THE TWO DIMENSION VERSION**



**THE SRI CHAKRA  
THE THREE DIMENSION VERSION**

The worship of Lalitha Devi has three components, the Mantra, the Tantra and the Yantra, representing respectively its articulated mental activity, the attendant physical activity and the Devi's presence in a physical graphic or iconic form. The last component is the Sri Chakra as reproduced in the above images and forms the central object of worship in the Sri Vidya form. This is an esoteric form of worship with the Panchadasakshari Mantra, referred to earlier in Chapter 3. It is shrouded in such great sanctity and secrecy that it can be followed only by devotees of deep commitment and only under the guidance of a guru.

The Sri Chakra is a masterpiece of graphic symbolic representation through a series of geometric patterns placed in a symmetric and concentric design, that can be seen even at a physical level as a great work of art. It would be of interest to the reader to have a closer work at both the geometry and symbolism which are bound by a common philosophical framework that is as unusual as it is unique.

The geometry uses a point, a line, a triangle, a circle and a square with the added aesthetics of petals of a lotus. Physically, the point has no dimensions, two points join to form a line, and two lines join to form an angle, and three to form a triangle, four to form a square and an infinite number of points join to form the circle and the flower, all these occupying finite spaces. The gates on the four sides open out into infinite outer space. Here then is a basic concept of a finite existence within an infinite continuum that ranges from the infinitely small to the infinitely large. This is where Geometry helps Man meet God. Swami Vivekananda had a beautiful geometry definition of Man and God. Man, he said, is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but the centre is in one spot; and God is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere !

To move on now to God. The point at the centre of the Sri Chakra, is the Bindu, a point that is beyond dimension, and is the Unmanifest Infinite, from which alone can the Manifest Finite emerge. The Bindu is the Unmanifest where Lalitha Devi resides and from where She emerges. When She emerges She brings with her the Divine Consciousness, Knowledge and Energy of the Unmanifest which enable Her to create the Universe. To administer the Universe, She creates gods and goddesses endowed with powers and potential and kinetic energies, that proliferate into every form of existence. All these attributes reach down into men and women and the other multifarious forms of the physical world that we know. The geometric point opens out into a series of lines to form the other geometric forms, of which, the triangles, four upright and five inverted, represent the male and female components of existence. Their



intersections and enclosures represent potentials, energies and faculties from where the onward forms of creation emerge.

Each part of the Sri Chakra is associated with three entities. First, a presiding deity bearing one of the names of the Mother. Second, a Bija Akshara or holy syllable around which the Mantra is built. And third, a specific psychic energy centre within the individual which help him to progress through a chain of higher centres to finally connect to the Divine into whom all energies finally merge.

Many of the Mother's names in the Lalitha Sahasranama clearly point in great detail to the linkages between these psychic energy centres within the individual to their counterparts represented in the Sri Chakra. These details are set out in the disciplines of the Kundalini Yoga, largely elaborated in the Tantra texts that draw ideas from the Vedas but were elaborated later by different cults and schools. While many Chakras, major and minor, have been envisaged by different schools, the most common with the widest following are seven in number, detailed as below by the Sakta school, and as affirmed by specific names in the Sahasranama :

- Muladhara : Located at the Prostate / Ovaries :**
  - Bija Akshara : Lam; Male Deity : Ganesha; Shakti as Dakini**
  - Associated function : Instinct, security**
- Svadhishthana : Located at Sacral bone of the Spine**
  - Bija Akshara : Vam; Male Deity : Brahma; Shakti as Rakini**
  - Associated function : Sex Reproduction.**
- Manipura : Located at the Solar Plexus or Navel :**
  - Bija Akshara : Ram; Male Deity : Braddha Siva; Shakti as Lakini**
  - Associated function : Metabolism and digestion**
- Anahata : Located at the Heart**
  - Bija Akshara : Yam; Male Deity : Rudra Siva; Shakti as Kakini**
  - Associated function : Immune system**
- Vishuddhi : Located at the throat**
  - Bija Akshara : Ham; Male Deity : Panchvaktra Siva : Shakti as Shakini**
  - Associated function : Growth and expression**
- Ajna : Located between the eyes (the third eye)**
  - Bija Akshara : OM, Male Deity : Ardhanariswara; Shakti as Hakini**
  - Associated function : Balancing lower and higher faculties**
- Sahasrara : Located at the crown of the head**
  - Deity : Siva united with Shakti as Yakini**
  - Associated function : Pure Consciousness**

The potential of all psychic energies are said to reside coiled up as the Kundalini in the Muladhara and is raised through sustained yogic self effort. This is by an upward ascent of the energies through the successive Chakras through a central channel called the Sushumna which is normally

closed, but can be opened by special yogic effort. Two supplementary channels called the Ida and Pingala along side the Sushumna run along the spinal column and are normally open and serve the flow of the normal energies sustaining life's normal activities. When the energies rising through the successive Chakras along the Sushumna reach the Sahasrara, the individual merges in the highest Consciousness level of the Divine. The entire conception of the Kundalini Yoga may be seen to have a relationship with the Nervous and Endocrinal systems of the body and a linkage with the physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual components of the human personality. We see how all these are reflected in a remarkable linkage between the graphic symbolism of the different parts of the Yantra and corresponding words of the Sahasranama and corresponding energy centres within the individual. . The Sri Chakra would indeed be symbolize at the same time, the human microcosm, the divine macrocosm of the Universe with both being part of One Ultimate Divine Unity.

From another perspective the individual is envisaged as constituted of energies, faculties and consciousness progressing from the gross to the subtle states through six levels or states. These are referred to as Kosas or sheaths that start with his body but extend beyond into space to become part of one vast continuum of Energy that constitutes all that exists. That is none other than Iswara, the Eternal Manifest. The five sheaths, in the order of increasing subtlety are :

The Annamaya Kosa : the Food level that sustains physical existence; the Pranamaya Kosa, the Air or vital energy level that sustains life; the Manomaya Kosha, or the Mind stuff that supports all thought; the Vijñanamaya Kosa or the Discriminatory faculty that leads to higher Knowledge and Truth; and finally the Anandamaya Kosha or State of Bliss that is the end objective of all existence.

This is the totality within which the individual functions where he becomes the junction of all external and internal experience. His senses of Sight, Hearing, Touch, Taste and Smell bring him all external experience. His faculties of Thought, Memory, Intuition, Instinct and Imagination open him to an internal experience that reach far beyond what his senses can bring him. The Tantra schools provide methodologies for linking internal and external powers, energies and experiences. All the senses are exercised in Tantric forms of worship. The sensory experience is not limited to the sound of the Mantra, and the touch of the Yantra but extends to the sight of colour in flowers and gems and smell of incense and perfumes. All these external experiences merge into the internal experiences generated by the Mantra and enables the individual to merge into one vast holistic experience of all that exists, the closest he can get to Iswara. The concept of Prana or vital energy is Energy in its most generic

form, that takes several forms and pervades, indeed under-writes the entirety of the internal and external existence.

What must be clearly understood is that while the human appears as a tiny entity physically delimited it is not as if he is an impervious entity. As a matter of fact, he is also basically energy but in a dense form and he can be absolutely transparent to energy in other forms such as X-Rays . There is no part of the human that is not exposed to energy in one form or another, in one level of subtlety or another, and this idea is captured by the concepts of different levels of subtlety of the sheaths encasing his personality. Nevertheless among the different vibratory forms which that Energy takes, Sound certainly takes a central audible position in the individual's experience providing him as it does the means of articulation and communication across the seemingly dividing lines between humans themselves and between humans and higher forms reaching up to the Divine. Sound may terminate physically at the ear-drum, but it proceeds in a different form into the Mind and ultimately acquires the highest level of subtlety as Meaning. That is why Sabda or Sound occupies a place of pre-eminence in the whole Vedic corpus and declares AUM as a Sound, that represents the First Manifestation of the Ultimate Reality. The Bible says the Word was with God and every religion has something similar to say

Most Upasanas or Prayers are generally prefaced by what are called Suddhi Mantras, which are purificatory invocations meant to start with a sense of purity in mind and heart, and resolve to make the prayer earnest and effective. The Mantras address the Chakras along the Susumna path within us, using their respective Bija Aksharas. It would be both relevant and appropriate to give a brief account here of one such Mantra, called the Bhuta-Siddhi Mantra. This Mantra runs as follows :

ॐ भूतशृङ्गाटाच्छिरः सुषुम्ना पथेन

जीवशिवं परमशिवपदे योजयामि स्वाहा ।

ōm bhūtaśṛṅgāṭācchira: suṣumnā pathēna

jīvaśivam paramaśivapadē yōjayāmi svāhā .

By means of the Susumna way extending from the admixture of elements (bhūtaśṛṅgāṭā) to the head (the Sahasrara Centre), I unite the individual microcosmic Jiva with the state of the Supreme Siva

ॐ यं लिङ्गशरीरं शोषय शोषय स्वाहा ।

ōm yaṃ liṅgaśarīraṃ śōṣaya śōṣaya svāhā .

**OM, dry up, dry up this subtle body, Svaha !**

ॐ रं शंकोचशरीरं दह दह स्वाहा ।

ōm raṃ śaṅkōcaśarīraṃ daha daha svāhā .

**OM, burn, burn this shrinking body, Svaha !**

ॐ परमशिव सुषूम्नापथेन मूलशृङ्गाटं

उल्लस उल्लस ज्वल ज्वल प्रज्वल प्रज्वल

सोऽहं हंसः स्वाहा ।

ōm paramaśiva suṣūmnāpathēna mūlaśṛṅgāṭaṃ

ullasa ullasa jvala jvala prajvala prajvala

sō'haṃ haṃsa: svāhā .

**OM, Supreme Siva, illuminate, illuminate the  
Sahasrara summit in the head through the  
Sushumna path. I am That, That I am, Svaha !**

The terminal word in each Mantra as in most invocatory Mantras, is Svaha, which is an invocation meaning “So be it” And when the physical sounds of these Mantras proceed beyond the eardrum into the Mind of the Devotee, their Meanings would traverse the pathways of the Nervous system and create a profound cleansing effect on every aspect of his personality, fully justifying their name as Suddhi Mantras. The regular Mantra that would follow would then have their full impact on the Chakra-Sushumna pathway of spiritual ascent.

The term bhūtaśṛṅgātā, in the first Mantra refers to composites of the five basic Bhutas or elements of Nature, Fire, Water, Earth, Air and Space/Matter and their Sensory Cognates of Sight. Hearing, Touch, Taste and Smell, which can be readily seen to support Ultimate Reality, “sō'haṃ” represents the inhalation and exhalation of air in the respiratory process, where Prana Vayu, the energy of vital air sustains life itself. The intake of

oxygen enriches the blood and sustains the assimilation of food while exhalation eliminates Carbon Dioxide as a waste product. These two processes are considered to be functions of the Ida and Pingala channels which are therefore always open. The adjoining Sushumna however, is always closed and opens only where there a qualitative refinement and development of the inner higher faculties of the individual. The involuntary respiratory cycle is repeated 21600 times a day throughout the lifetime of an individual and is considered to be a spontaneous Japa or repetition of the body of the “sō’ham” Mantra. All these facts point to the extraordinary depths of intuitive effort of the ancient Rishis who could envision the totality of all existence and all its processes.

It is thus that the triad of the Mantra, Yantra and Tantra was presented as a means for man to establish through his own faculties a conduit for connecting to and receiving from the Divine the blessings of the higher consciousness, knowledge and energy. And when the Devi is installed in a temple with the Sri Chakra Yantra inscribed at Her feet and is addressed by Mantra and Tantra, She becomes a living presence among the people, bestowing Her Grace directly upon them.

The foregoing Chapters have largely elaborated the different methodologies of finding a path for communicating with the Divine through the mind. It would therefore be appropriate at this point to give the reader a closer look at this marvelous faculty called the Mind. To the Mind then, shall we now turn.

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## **CHAPTER 7 – MANAS – BUDDHI : THE MIND**

The discussions so far have made it clear that the Mantra is a key to what is perhaps, the most important gateway of the Mind that gives access to a vast array of perspectives that enable understanding the totality of Existence. We need now to get a clear idea of the Mind itself and how it opens these vast perspectives to us.

The question, What is the Mind, does not admit of a single or simple answer. Words like Brain, Thought, Memory, Knowledge, Awareness, Imagination, Intelligence, Consciousness, Instinct and Intuition are often offered as interchangeable answers. It may be more accurate to describe all these as faculties that support different functions. The brain is perhaps the only one of them to have a material basis. All the others do not have a material existence, but are more akin to forms of energy that reside in the physical structures of the brain. Energy itself has a vast variety of forms and functions, though ultimately they merge into one primordial form which our ancients called the Prana. Modern biology refers to the body comprised of vast networks of nerves that carry messages in the form of electrical energy or of blood vessels that carry messages in the form of chemical energy. The ancient Indians however preferred to consider energy in a vast variety of forms differentiated by functions. At a mechanical level Prana was associated with Vayu and differentiated according to bodily functions of respiration, locomotion, assimilation, elimination and reproduction under the names of Prana, Apana, Udana, Vyana and Samana Vayu.

At the lowest mechanical level of operation, the Mind may be likened to a Computer. The individual's five Jnanendriyas, the input devices receive the signals of sight, smell, touch, taste and sound from objects of the external world, store them, index them, and integrate them into images. Internally these images are remitted to higher faculties that assign names and meanings to these images, and then issue instructions as outputs to one or other of the five Karmendriyas that drive their respective bodily functions referred to above. The above processing actions are akin to those of a computer. But all the Mind's activities are not limited to just this physical level of handling sensory input and physical output. There are other more subtle levels activities that need to be so serviced, like the levels of the emotions, the intellect, the imagination, the intuition and the spiritual. These levels need special forms of communication which require special types of channels and forms of energy. These channels and forms are always there in the Mind for potential use, but some of them may require to both conditioning and exercising to become available. Making a call to God is not as simple as lifting a telephone and dialling a number. It requires a conditioning of the Mind through faith, belief and other

disciplines to generate the special channels. One such discipline is the Mantra which is not only the message but also creates the medium or channel for its communication. The words of Marshall MacLuhan "The medium is the message" has a direct parallel here.

There are also vast internal processing and communication networks within the whole body that can accomplish fantastic feats of communication across several dimensions, and of which our computer networks are but poor imitations. We may get some useful insights into these networks from the newly emerging disciplines of Mind-Body Medicine. If we were to define the Mind as Living Matter, it immediately cries for definitions of Life and Matter. Science has been saying that they are two different things, Vedanta's final finding is that they are ONE. Be it noted that the meaning of the word Vedanta is the final Word of the Veda, and meaning of Veda is Knowledge. But today Science is not so sure and this uncertainty is being presented by Mind-Body Science, much as Heisenberg's Principle in 1927 brought uncertainty into the dividing line between Matter and Energy. While Physics has gone beyond the atom to the sub-atomic world, Biology has had to stop at the molecular world where the chemistry of life's activities is rooted. Today's advances of Molecular Biology have found that it is at the molecular level of the cell that arise the energies that create matter and life and also hold them together in networks, with electrical messaging through the nerves and chemical messaging through the blood vessels reaching into every nook and corner of the body.

The entirety of the body is built of the cell as the common unit of both matter and life. It is estimated that body of each individual is populated by 50 trillion cells, not to mention 15 billion neurons in the brain, a figure that needs to be compared with the world's human population of 7 billion. At the heart of each cell is its life unit, the DNA molecule, which ultimately supports all the principal functions that the full body performs. It generates, assimilates and digests all its needs, replicates itself for maintenance of the body, eliminates the consequent waste, moves around and sends and receives messages to all parts of the body to sustain all of life's activities. The DNA is near identical across all species and across all organs within the body, yet, in each, it maintains different unique functions. The knowledge, consciousness and energy of the Divine that creates the multiplicity of form and function of all existence seem to be faithfully replicated down to the level of the DNA. Like the Mind, each cell performs like the computer described earlier. It identifies every new incoming message from every part of the body and responds to each of them with whatever action is appropriate, to protect and sustain the body. Here then an extraordinary intelligence network connecting every neuron in the brain to every cell in the body. Each cell has an inbuilt chemical factory to create

clones of itself, and to create its own medicines that protects itself and the whole body of which it is a member.

The Indian ancients had a unique approach to their investigations of all the phenomena of existence, including all aspects of human existence. They always searched for meaningful principles rather than meaningless details. And finally they seemed to encounter two fundamental principles sustaining all existence : Energy and Intelligence. Even these two seemed to merge into a Unitary principle they called Prana. Every direction of investigation seemed to converge ultimately into greater and greater integration and ultimately end in One Ultimate Unity.

Energy itself has been shown now by modern Science to be spread over a large number of forms and states. It could be tangible matter in solid, liquid or gaseous states. Or it could be intangible energy spread over a vast spectrum of frequencies, with its different segments showing vastly different qualities and properties. And these frequencies carried the capacity for instantaneous communication of varied types of information.

All this was envisaged by the Indian ancients, but expressed differently in terms of categories and principles. A single form of Energy, the Prana, was seen to differentiated into matter in terms of Fire, Earth, Air, Water and Ether. These were transformed progressively further into the Triad principles of the Sattva-Rajas-Tamas, the Prana-Tejas-Ojas and the Vata-Pitta-Kapha, all deeply penetrating and influencing the entirety of the physical, psychological and spiritual states of the individual's existence.

The Mind was seen by the ancients as the locus of the highest faculties of Consciousness and Intelligence. Here Consciousness was linked upwards to its Original Source while Intelligence was linked downwards to support the needs of downstream existence. The Mind retained in association with the brain certain higher levels of intelligence that would enable the individual, not only to understand and master the external world of Nature, but also understand and master the internal world of his own body. And indeed in same Mind, also resided the higher faculty of Consciousness that could take him far higher, if he was so inclined, to relate and connect to the highest Divine.

It is access to this highest level of the Divine, through the Mind that invests the human with his unique status and purpose in Creation. The ancient Rishis recognized and realized that human life had its meaning and purpose that could be found only through the Mind, and therefore went to extraordinary lengths to study the Mind. And quite certainly they were endowed with extraordinary intuitive insights to uncover all faculties and



dimensions of the Mind and also master all the disciplines that would enable the individual also to do so. Their investigations led them to conclude that the Mind encompassed a wide range of faculties at three broad levels, roughly describable as those of Consciousness, Intellect and Reason

The first level of Reason is called Manas. It supported different lower levels of faculties and functions. At the most basic level, it had a capacity to receive the different forms and levels of incoming energy impulses representing whatever the five sensory organs observed in the external world. This faculty had the capacity to refer these inputs to higher internal faculties and receive their advice, and then transmit different forms and levels of outgoing energy impulses as instructions to the different organs of action to act appropriately on the external world. This faculty also had the phenomenal capacity to convert every form and level of energy to one common form that was accessible to all levels of the Mind for whatever onward processes they were designed. Slightly higher than this basic faculty of routing input and out, was a slightly higher level of Reason that handled cognition, collating, indexing, storing and retrieving information much in the manner of a computer. The faculty of Instinct, which is largely related to involuntary physical experience may perhaps be considered together with voluntary physical experience with which Reason was largely concerned.

Higher than that level of Reason was the level of the Intellect or Buddhi, which embraced a wide range of thinking with methods of analysis and synthesis, and discrimination and judgement on philosophical issues like True and False, ethical issues of Right and Wrong and emotional issues like Love and Hate. These judgments would color the internal thoughts or external actions of an individual and determine the level of the harmony that prevails between him and his environment

The highest level of the Mind was Consciousness that drives the individual to distinguish between True and False, Real and Unreal, and reach into the larger Consciousness in which the entirety of Existence is placed. One may visualize the entirety of Consciousness is coterminous, if not indeed identical, with One Ultimate Form of Energy that in its myriad forms and functions constitute our objective and subjective worlds. This is the Divine as perceived by our ancient Rishis.

The Mantra was a simple solution that could give everyone some measure of connectivity to the Divine, depending on the method of its use and the level of the Mind that was invoked by the devotee. But could this benefit of access to the Divine through the Mantra be available to the large mass of people who could not invoke the higher faculties of the Mind ? The Rishis were men of great compassion who would want the benefit to

reach this large mass of common people. For them, therefore, they prescribed simple methods of using the Mantra, simply through their recourse to the universal qualities of Love, Faith and Devotion. These were the methods of Japa and Stotra, to which we now turn our attention.

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## CHAPTER 8 – JAPA & STOTRA

### MEDITATIVE REPETITION & DEVOTIONAL PRAISE

One of the unique features of the religious culture introduced by the Vedas over 5000 years ago in India is the way it was designed and propagated across the whole subcontinent and beyond, across the boundaries of race, language, belief and such social, economic and political divisions as existed then. And it was a culture that provided articulation for all levels of knowledge, shades of belief and modes of expression. It provided all these within a single integrated structure that accorded with the emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs not merely for the learned, but more importantly for the large masses of the unlettered common man. At the highest level were the Vedas, and at the popular level were the Puranas and Itihasas. The Kalakshepa or art of story-telling based on the Puranas and Itihasas provided a powerful medium for an almost universal and popular reach, appeal and impact. The power and appeal of the Vedas, similarly reached into masses, in forms of public worship in temples and private worship in homes. The form or intent of even the Mantra were built into practices that were easy to adopt individually or in groups, like the Japa, Stotra, Samkeertana, and Bhajana. All these forms thus became part of the psyche of the whole people with all forms of public and private worship becoming a dominant feature of Indian life to a degree not found in any other culture or society right up to the present day.

Japa is a [simple discipline](#) consisting of meditative repetition of a [mantra](#) or name of a divinity. The articulation may be aloud or softly under the breath, or at more advanced stage, within the devotee's mind. *Japa* may be performed in some [meditative posture](#), or incidental to other activities, religious or otherwise. The number of repetitions and their timings or frequency are sometimes prescribed but more often determined for oneself. Aids like a rosary are often used to maintain the count of repetitions. All these features are of course, to be found in all the important religions of the world.

The stated aim, or goal of Japa may vary greatly depending on the mantra involved and the religious philosophy of the practitioner. In both [Buddhist](#) and [Hindu](#) traditions mantras may be given to aspirants by their [guru](#), after some form of [initiation](#). The stated goal could be [moksha](#), [nirvana](#), [bhakti](#), or simple personal communion with a divine power in a similar way to prayer. Many [gurus](#) and other spiritual teachers, and other religious leaders, especially Hindu and Buddhist, teach that these aims with different names often stand for the same transformed state of consciousness. After long use of a mantra that is intended to foster self-realization or intimacy with a divine power, an individual may reach what is

called a state of [ajapajapam](#). In [ajapajapam](#), the mantra "repeats itself" in the mind.

Nama Japam or Nama Samkeerthanam is the repetition or chanting of the name of the Ishta devata, or cherished [deity](#). . This is the easiest way of [Bhakti](#) yoga. The devotee repeatedly [chants](#) the name vocally or in the mind anytime, anywhere. Devotees can form a group and engage in samkeerthanam or singing together of the name of the Almighty. [Bhajans](#) are one such way of group singing, with a rising tempo and pitch where the participant loses himself in emotional and devotional fervour as if in sublimation of one's ego to an ego-less state. Ancient scriptures and philosophers prescribed this method to be best suited to offset the moral and spiritual decline that would characterize the human condition during the Kali Yuga.

In Hinduism, a Stotra is a hymn of praise. These hymns praise aspects of the divine, such as [Devi](#), [Siva](#), or [Vishnu](#). The word Stotra is related to the word "stuti". Both come from the same verb, stu which means "to praise". The Stotra is in the same class of the popular disciplines of the Japa and Samkeertana, though slightly more difficult. Stotras are evocative praises of the qualities and powers, some short, some massive, and set in poetry of high aesthetic and emotional appeal. The Sahasranamas or Thousand Names of Vishnu and Lalitha are the most valued for their sanctity. Apart from the fact that memorizing them can make for phenomenal enhancement of the memory faculty, their far greater value lie in presenting the highest qualities of experience as standards for the devotee to aspire to. These become embedded in the mind as a powerful influence on the thoughts and actions of the individual.

Sankara extolled the recitation of the Gita and the Vishnu Sahasranama as bestowing all noble virtues on those who chanted them [Rama](#) Nama has remained one of the most popular and potent means for obtaining contentment and spiritual enlightenment, as exemplified in the lives of great devotees like [Hanuman](#), [Samarth Ramdas](#), Tulasidas, Kabirdas, Thyagaraja, Ramdas, and in our day, Gandhi. In Brhad-Vishnu-sahasranama-stotra, ([Padma Purana](#) 72.335), [Shiva](#) addresses [Parvati](#) thus:

sri rama rama rameti rame rame manorame; sahasra nama tat tulyam  
rama nama varanane

"O Varanana (lovely-faced one), I chant the holy name of [Rama](#),  
Rama, Rama and thus constantly enjoy this beautiful sound. This  
holy name of Ramachandra is equal to one thousand holy names of  
Lord Vishnu."

Among the ancient Indian texts, the Itihasas – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - addressed the history in conventional terms of the human

setting of kings and nations. The Puranas, on the other hand consist of narratives of the history of the Universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of the kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. The Puranas usually give prominence to a particular deity and make extensive use of religious and philosophical concepts.

But all these texts were presented in a humanistic context for the understanding and enlightenment of ordinary, simple people, who are not burdened by rationalistic, intellectual or spiritual pretences. To such folk, what is considered super-natural in these texts is accepted as easily as what is considered natural and their understanding rests on the simple faith in an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God for whom nothing is impossible.

The story lines and settings of all the episodes of the Itihasas and Puranas admitted of highly appealing presentations, not only of story-telling to the accompaniment of music, but also of dance and drama. These forms of entertainment became part of everyday social life of the common people over the centuries. This was in no small measure responsible for virtually internalizing the spirit of those stories in the minds of the people. It was thus that religion and religious fervour have come to be part and parcel of the psyche of the people of India.

It will thus be seen that the Japa has been established as a discipline to constantly think of the Divine, and the Stotra likewise to constantly strive for the highest qualities exemplified by the Divine while providing the Mantra as a way of finally connecting to the Divine. All these methods make for convergence on one objective : to condition the Mind and direct all human energy and effort towards the Divine. There is one final discipline that will now be seen to unify all these paths to converge and finally unite in the Divine. This is the discipline of Yoga, which appropriately means Union, and we may now turn to this in the next Chapter.

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## **CHAPTER 9 – YOGA : UNION WITH THE ULTIMATE**

The philosophic systems of India are called Darshanas. The Sanskrit word Darshana means Perception. Six Darshanas, namely Nyaya, Vaishesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta, are referred to as the Orthodox, or Astika Darshanas, as they acknowledge the authority of the Vedas. In contradistinction, are the three systems Buddhism, Jainism and the Charvaka schools, referred to as the Unorthodox, or Nastika Darshanas, as they do not accept Vedic authority.

The Astika Darshanas or religious philosophies agree that "Moksha", or emancipation from the cycle of rebirths, leading to identity with the Ultimate Reality, is the highest objective of existence. Their approaches differ, with Yoga focusing on the current birth and presenting various disciplines of mind and body that lead the individual through cultivation of a healthy body and mind, into an active life of rectitude and purpose, and keep him on the path of moral advancement, which will ultimately lead to the same goal.

Yoga, in its most generic definition, stands for "path" or "approach", leading to Moksha, though a literal meaning is "union", referring to union or identification with the Ultimate Reality. Yoga implies both the path and destination, the method and the objective. The doctrine of Karma postulates that man accumulates the results of the good and bad actions of his lifetime, into what may be called a moral balance sheet. And as long as the balance is not a zero (a subtle point to be noted here is that both a positive and negative balance will invite rebirth), Moksha will be out of his reach, and he has to work it out in a succession of lives, which Dr. Radhakrishnan describes beautifully, as a succession of spiritual opportunities. There are always, of course, the rare exceptions, the Jeevan Muktas, who attain the ultimate objective within their lifetime, as living demonstrations that Moksha is no idle dream, but an ever-present possibility within reach of anyone who has the will.

The various ideas and concepts related to Yoga, are collectively referred to as the Yoga Sastra, or the Science of Yoga. References to them are strewn all over the philosophical and religious literature of India, and are addressed in considerable detail in the Gita. It is interesting to note that each of the 18 Chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita carries the name of a Yoga : Vishada (Sorrow), Samkhya (Knowledge),

Karma (Action), Jnana-Karma Samnyasa (Renunciation of Action in Knowledge and Action), Samnyasa (Renunciation), Dhyana (Meditation), Jnana-Vijnana (Knowledge with Realization). Akshara Brahma (The Imperishable Reality), Raja-Vidya Raja-Guhya (Inner Knowledge), Vichada (Glimpses of Divinity), Viswa-Rupa-Darshana (Direct Experience of the Divine), Bhakti (Devotion), Kshetra-Kshetrajna (the Immanent Divine), Guna-Traya (the three Limiting Attributes), Purushottama (the Highest Divine), Daiva-Asura Sampath (the Divine-Non-divine Divide), Shraddha-Traya (the three Devotional levels), and Moksha-Samnyasa (Liberation in Renunciation). One sees here a marvelous presentation of a sequence of Yoga approaches to progress from a life of sorrow to a life of freedom from sorrow.



All the essential ideas and concepts from all the different sources have been assembled together by Patanjali, making his work, more or less, a master reference work on Yoga. The Yoga Sutra, as it's title indicates, treats of it's subject in the form of the Sutra (meaning a string, here denoting a string of thoughts, like a string of gems). The Sutra, corresponds to the Aphorism, and is a literary form with an astonishing combination of depth and brevity. Ancient Sanskrit works explicitly define a Sutra as a text that fulfils the requisites of brevity, clarity, certainty, and being faultless and comprehensive in meaning. This literary form was evolved to preserve accuracy of knowledge content in a tradition of oral transmission of knowledge, a tradition that has been responsible for the preservation of knowledge in India through thousands of years with remarkable accuracy.

The Yoga Sutra – the system is also referred to as the Raja Yoga - argues for directing the mind and body towards change for the better, and provides a methodology for doing this. The methods proposed,

include a regulatory regimen for the body, and practices that give the mind the quality of steadiness in the midst of the unremitting diversionary efforts of the senses, which respond constantly to the stimuli of the external world. Obviously every effort in this direction would give physical and mental fitness so essential to taking us forward on the path to whatever goal we may set ourselves.

In the Yoga Sutra, the mind occupies a pivotal position between body and higher faculties. All the facets of how the mind holds the balance between the physical and the moral being are treated in the Yoga Sutra in ways which any modern psychologist would be proud to own. Practice of Yoga in the light of the teachings of the Yoga Sutra would be most beneficial. And a study of the Yoga Sutra would also make for an ideal entry point for a study of the Darshanas of India.

The first definition of Yoga in the Yoga Sutra and its translation are as follows :

### योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

Yoga is the ability to direct the mind exclusively toward an object and sustain that direction without any distractions.

Patanjali's system is also referred to as "Ashtanga Yoga" ("Eight-Limbed Yoga"). This eight-limbed concept derived from the 29<sup>th</sup> Sutra of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book, and is a core characteristic of practically every Raja yoga variation taught today. The Eight Limbs are:

### यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टावङ्गानि

This Sutra lists eight components of Yoga as below :

1. Yama, our attitudes toward our environment. This envisages five "abstentions": non-violence, non-lying, non-covetousness, non-sensuality, and non-possessiveness.

2. Niyama, our attitudes toward ourselves. This envisages five "observances" : purity, contentment, austerity, study, and surrender to [god](#).

3. Asana, the practice of bodily exercises. Asana means "seat", and in Patanjali's Sutras refers to the seated position used for meditation.

4. Pranayama, the practice of breathing exercises. *Prāna* means breath, and "āyāma", means to restrain or stop.



5. Pratyahara, the restraint of our senses. This refers to Abstraction : withdrawal of the attention of the sense organs to external objects.

6. Dharana, the ability to direct our minds. This refers to Concentration : fixing the attention on a single object.

7. Dhyana, the ability to develop interactions with what we seek to understand. This refers to Meditation : Intense contemplation of the nature of the object of meditation.

8. Samadhi, complete integration with the object to be understood. This requires merging consciousness with the object of meditation

Consider the following words of Krishna In the [Bhagavad Gita](#) :

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय ,

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते 2-48

O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), perform your duties established in Yoga, renounce attachment and remain balanced in success and failure; such a balance is called Yoga. (2-48)

This defines the practice of Yoga clearly as a framework of discipline for the activities of every day living. And it is a discipline that is designed to condition the Mind for integration with a higher consciousness, which is also the objective of the Mantra. Having thus dealt with the subject of the Mantra from several perspectives, we may now conclude our narrative with a final Chapter, appropriately named after the Ultimate Mantra, the Maha Vakya.

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## CHAPTER 10 – THE MAHA VAKYA - THE ULTIMATE MANTRA

Our search for Knowledge, for Truth, if sincere and unrelenting, proceeds with unending questions, often continuing through a lifetime. But most of us seldom seem to get a final answer that make us feel that we have reached the end of the search. Much of our failures come from our not knowing what we are looking for, and consequently asking the wrong questions. We therefore need the help of a teacher or Guru, or a Scripture where the Rishis give the answers. The Mahavakya is one final answer given to us by the Rishis in the Vedas

Seers of ancient India recognized that an integrated understanding of our internal and external world required an integrated understanding of our internal and external faculties of perception. And their very first direct and obvious conclusion was that the external faculties, could serve to study only the external, not the internal world. Even what these faculties recorded of the external world was restricted by their own physical structure to narrow confines of time and space, and hence could only provide a partial view. Internal faculties, however, could transcend all these limitations, and could provide a fuller view of the totality of experience, both internal and external. Uncompromising observation and experience within such a totality of perception and analyzed and understood in the light of logic taken to it's ultimate limits, led the ancient seers to the conviction that all existence, living or otherwise, sprang ultimately from one single Reality that they called Brahman. All seemingly individual existences sprang from the very same Reality, which was referred to as the Atman in the individual context. This finding found it's loftiest expression in the Vedas, in what are called the Mahavakyas or Great Aphorisms, like "Tat Tvam Asi", or "That Art Thou", where That refers to the Brahman and Thou to the Atman within us, meaning that it is the same Ultimate Reality that pervades our internal and external worlds.

The Mahavakyas are "The Great Sayings" of the [Upanishads](#), the foundational texts of [Vedanta](#). Though there are many Sayings that are seen as great, four of them, one from each of the four [Vedas](#), are generally considered as the Mahavakyas. The subject matter and the essence of all Upanishads being the same, all the Upanishadic Mahavakyas express this one universal message in the form of terse and concise statements. The four Upanishadic statements indicate the ultimate [unity](#) of the individual ([Atman](#)) with God ([Brahman](#)).

The Mahavakyas are:

1. [prajñānam brahma](#) - "Consciousness is Brahman" ([Aitareya Upanishad](#) 3.3 of the [Rig Veda](#))
2. [ayam ātmā brahma](#) - "This Self (Atman) is Brahman" ([Mandukya Upanishad](#) 1.2 of the [Atharva Veda](#))
3. [tat tvam asi](#) - "Thou art That" ([Chandogya Upanishad](#) 6.8.7 of the [Sama Veda](#))
4. [aham brahmāsmi](#) - "I am Brahman" ([Brhadaranyaka Upanishad](#) 1.4.10 of the [Yajur Veda](#))

The [Kanchi Paramacharya](#), in his book, *Hindu Dharma* refers to these four Mahavakyas, and says:

It is to attain this highest of states in which the individual self dissolves inseparably in [Brahman](#) that a man becomes a [sannyasin](#) after forsaking the very karma that gives him inward maturity. When he is initiated into sanyasa he is taught four mantras, the four mahavakyas.

The Aitareya Upanishad is one of the older, "primary" [Upanishads](#). It forms part of the Aitareya Aranyaka of the Rig Veda and is attributed to the Rishi Aitareya Mahidasa. It is a short prose text, divided into three chapters, containing 33 verses. The entire work is devoted to a description of the Atman. The third chapter deals with the qualities of the self or [Brahman](#). It contains the Maha Vakya "Prajnanam Brahma" The sentence means Consciousness is Brahman, and is thus a definition of Reality. The best definition of Brahman would be to give expression to its supra-essential essence, and not to describe it with reference to attributes of any kind. That which is ultimately responsible for all our sensory activities, as seeing, hearing, etc., is Consciousness. Though Consciousness does not directly see or hear, it is impossible to have these sensory operations without it. Hence the saying should be considered as enveloping all our mental and physical activities. Brahman is that which is Absolute and is continuously present in everything, from the creator down to the lowest of matter. It, being everywhere, is also in each and every individual.

The Maha Vakya "Aham Brahmasmi" means "I am Brahman" and comes from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda. The 'I' in this saying is that which is the One Witnessing Consciousness, within each individual, but standing apart from the ego and every faculty while at the same time illuminating them. This Witness-Consciousness, being the same in all, is universal, and cannot be distinguished from Brahman, which is the Absolute. Hence this real 'I' which is full, super-rational and resplendent,

has to be the same as Brahman. The phrase “I am” is not an empirical identification of two entities but an affirmation of an aspect of one Brahman. The following oft-quoted prayer from the individual to the Supreme, from the Unreal “I” to the Real “I” comes from this Upanishad.

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय ।

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ॥

मृत्योर्मा मृतं गमय ।

ॐ शान्ति शान्ति शान्ति ॥ – बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद् 1.3.28.

om asato mā sad gamaya

tamaso mā jyotir gamaya

mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya

om śānti śānti śānti – brhadāraṇyaka upaniṣada 1.3.28

Lead Us From the Unreal To the Real,

Lead Us From Darkness To Light,

Lead Us From Death To Immortality,

Let There Be Peace Peace Peace. (1.3.28.)

The Maha Vakya, ‘Tat Tvam Asi’ or ‘That Thou Art’ comes from the Chandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda. These words occur in an interesting discussion of far-reaching significance between the Sage *Uddalaka Aruni* and his son *Svetaketu*. With several examples the Sage explains to his son how all that exists and is perceived, ultimately comes from one essence, one Truth, that cannot be so perceived. He bids his son to bring him a fruit from the nearby banyan tree, break it open and see what is inside. When *Svetaketu* does so, and says he finds small seeds, the sage bids him break one seed and see what is inside. *Svetaketu* does so, he says he finds nothing in it. The Sage then explains that it is not nothing, but something that cannot be seen – it is a subtle essence from which springs the seed, and ultimately grows into the big tree that they behold. It is not ‘nothing’, says the Sage, it is something for which we use the word ‘That’, simply because we have no word that can ever describe it. It is not ‘nothing’ that leads to the seed and the tree, continues the Sage, but something that leads to all that exists, including you and me. The words “*Tat Tvam Asi*” or “That Thou Art”, with which the Sage concludes several examples, are words described as the mahā vākya, (महा वाक्य) or Great Saying, that echoes down the ages, representing its highest wisdom offered by India. The *Chandogya Upanishad* verse (6.8.7) reads thus in Sanskrit :

स य एषोऽणिमैतदात्म्यमिदं सर्वं तत्सत्यं स आत्मा तत्त्वमसि श्वेतकेतो  
इति भूय एव मा भगवान्विज्ञापयत्विति तथा सोम्येति होवाच ।।  
sa ya ēṣō'ṇimaitadātmyamidam sarvaṁ tatsatyam sa ātmā tattvamasi  
śvatakakētōna iti bhūya mā bhagavānvijñāpayatviti tathā sōmyēti  
hōvāca

Sage Uddalaka mentions this nine times, while instructing his disciple Svetaketu in the nature of Reality. That which is one alone without a second, without name and form, and which existed before creation, as well as after creation, as pure Existence alone, is what is referred to as Tat or That, in this sentence. The term Tvam stands for that which is in the innermost recesses of the student or the aspirant, but which is transcendent to the intellect, mind, senses, etc., and is the real 'I' of the student addressed in the teaching. The union of Tat and Tvam is by the term Asi or are. That Reality is remote is a misconception, which is removed by the instruction that it is within one's own self. The erroneous notion that the Self is limited is dispelled by the instruction that it is the same as Reality.

The Maha Vakya, 'Ayam Atma Brahma' or 'This Self is Brahman', comes from the Mandukya Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, It gets its name from a Rishi named Mandukha. It is a very short Upanishad, comprised of just 12 stanzas. Yet, within this short compass, it analyses the whole spectrum of consciousness, in terms of the the three states of mind that everyone experiences, viz. the states of wakefulness, of dream and of deep sleep. It then points to the Atman or the Brahman as the ultimate source which manifests as the individual and his consciousness or the Universe and its laws. The identity of the Atman and the Brahman is proclaimed in this Maha Vakya. The terse brevity of this Upanishad, epitomising this central core of the Upanishadic teaching, led to its being chosen for a detailed

commentary, not only by Sankara but even earlier, by his preceptor's preceptor, Gaudapada. Indeed, a study of Gaudapada's Mandukya Karika is considered an important aid to a full understanding of the Mandukya Upanishad.

‘Ayam’ means ‘this’, and here ‘thisness’ refers to the self-luminous and non-mediate nature of the Self, which is immanent in everything, from the Ahamkara or ego down to every point in the physical body. This Self is Brahman, which is the substance out of which all things are really made. That which is everywhere, is also within us, and what is within us is everywhere. This is called ‘Brahman’, because it fills all space, expands into all existence, and is vast beyond all measure of perception or knowledge. On account of self-luminosity, non-relativity and universality, Atman and Brahman are the same. This identification of the Self with Absolute is not any act of bringing together two differing natures, but is an affirmation that absoluteness or universality includes everything, and there is nothing outside it.

The Maha Vakya may thus be seen to be the highest Mantra, the oldest and most unique affirmation of Man of his identity with the Divine that confers on his existence its true meaning and purpose.

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# **ANNEXURE**

## **THE CONVERGENCE OF SCIENCE & VEDANTA**

### **SPEECHES AND WRITINGS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND SOME SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS FROM MEN OF SCIENCE AND OTHERS OF EMINENCE**



#### **Speeches of Swami Vivekananda : London – 1896 :**

**Materialism prevails in Europe today. You may pray for the salvation of the modern sceptics, but they do not yield, they want reason. The salvation of Europe depends on a rationalistic religion, and Advaita – the non-duality, the oneness, the idea of the Impersonal God – is the only religion that can have any hold on any intellectual people. It comes whenever religion seems to disappear and irreligion seems to prevail, and that is why it has taken ground in Europe and America.**

### **Speech : New York – 1896 :**

When a great ancient sage, a seer, or a prophet of old, who came face to face with the truth, these modern men stand up and say 'Oh, he was a fool!' But just use another name, 'Huxley says it or Tyndall', then it must be true, and they take it for granted. In place of ancient superstitions, in place of old Popes of religion, they have installed modern Popes of Science.

### **Letters of Swami Vivekananda : USA -1896 : (in a letter describing a meeting with the famous electrician-scientist Nikolai Tesla)**

Mr. Tesla was charmed to hear about the Vedantic Prana and Akasa and the Kalpas, which according to him, are the only theories modern science can entertain .... Mr. Tesla thinks he can demonstrate mathematically that force and matter are reducible to potential energy. I am to go and see him next week to get this new mathematical demonstration... (Tesla failed to keep this promise and Science had to wait another ten years for Einstein to prove the oneness of matter and energy).

### **Letter : USA – 1896 : (in a letter to his Madras disciple, Alasinga)**

Then you see, to put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time, meet the requirements of the highest minds – is a task only those can understand who have attempted it .....

.....The dry abstract Advaita must become living – poetic – in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology – and all this must be put in a form that a child may grasp it. This is my life's work .....

### **Writings of Swami Vivekananda :**

Vivekananda summarized Vedanta in the following sentences in one of his his writings

- (1) Each soul is potentially divine.
- (2) The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.
- (3) Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy – by one, or more, or all these – and be free.
- (4) This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples or forms are but secondary details.



### **Writings :**

One atom in this universe cannot move without dragging the whole world along with it. There cannot be any progress without the whole world following in the wake, and it is every day becoming clearer that the solution of any problem can never be attained on racial, or national, or narrow grounds. Every idea has to become broad till it covers the whole of this world, every aspiration must go on increasing till it has engulfed the whole of humanity, nay, the whole of life within its scope.

Physics is bounded on both sides by Metaphysics. So it is with reason – it starts with non-reason and ends with non-reason. If we push inquiry far enough in the world of perception, we must reach a plane beyond perception. Reason is only stored up and classified perception, preserved by memory. We can never imagine or reason beyond our perceptions.....

Religion is the science which learns transcendental in nature through transcendental in man. We know as yet little of man, consequently but little of the universe. When we know more of man, we shall probably know more of the universe. Man is the epitome of all things and all knowledge is in him. Only for an infinitesimal part of the universe, which comes into some perception, are we able to find a reason, never can we give the reason for any fundamental principle.

### **Writings :**

The Vedanta also shows that what is called intelligence is a compound. For instance, let us examine our perceptions. I see a blackboard. How does the knowledge come? That the German philosophers call 'the thing in itself' of the blackboard is not known. I can never know it. Let us call it x. The blackboard x acts on my mind, and the mind reacts. The mind is like a lake. Throw a stone in a lake and a reactionary lake comes towards the stone; this stone is not like the stone at all, it is a wave. The blackboard x is like a stone which strikes the mind, and the mind throws up a wave towards it, and the wave is what we call the blackboard. I see you. You as reality are unknown and unknowable. You are x and you act upon my mind, and the mind throws a wave in the direction from which the impact comes, and that wave is what I call Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so. There are two elements in the perception, one coming from outside and the other from inside, and the combination of the two, x + mind, is our external universe. All knowledge is by reaction. In the case of a whale, it has been determined by calculation how long after its tail is struck, its mind reacts and the whale feels the pain. Similar is the case with internal perception. The real self within me is also unknown and unknowable. Let us call it y. When I know myself as so-and-so, it is y + the mind. That y strikes a blow on the mind. So our whole world is x + mind (external) and y + Mind (internal), x and y standing for 'the thing in itself' behind the external and internal world respectively.

### **Writings :**

Cause and Effect are all Maya, and we shall soon grow to understand that all we see is disconnected as the child's fairy tales now seem to us. There is no such thing as cause and effect and we shall come to know of it. Then, if you can, lower your intellect to let the allegory pass through your mind without questioning about connection.

The one peculiar attribute we find in time, space and causation, is that they cannot exist separate from things. Try to think of space without colour or limits or any connection with things around – just abstract space. You cannot. You have to think of it as space between two limits, or between three objects. It has to be connected with some object to have any existence. So with time; you cannot have any idea of abstract time, but you have to take two events by the idea of succession. Time depends on two events, just as space has to be related to outside objects. And the idea of causation is inseparable from time and space. (The words vividly anticipate the words of Einstein a couple of decades later !)

### **Writings :**

Some say that by controlling internal nature we control everything. Others, that by controlling external nature we control everything. Carried to the extrem, both are right, because in nature, there is no such division as internal or external. These are fictitious limitations that never existed. The externalities and internalities are destined to meet at the same point, when both reach the extreme of their knowledge. Just as a physicist, when he pushes his knowledge to its limit, finds it melting away into metaphysics, so too, a metaphysician will find that what he calls mind and matter are but apparent distinctions, the reality being One.

### **Writings :**

I do not mean that those who want to search after external nature are wrong, nor that those who search after truth through internal nature are higher. These are two modes of procedure. Both of them must live, both of them must be studied and in the end, we shall find that they meet. We shall see that neither is the body antagonistic to the mind, nor is the mind to the body, although we may find many persons who think this body is nothing. In old times, every country was full of people who thought that this body was only a disease, a sin, or something of that kind. Later on however, we see how, as it was taught in the Vedas, this body melts into the mind and the mind melts into the body.

### **Writings :**

Religion is above reason, supernatural. Faith is not belief, it is a grasp on the ultimate, an illumination. Stick to your reason until you reach something higher, and you will know it to be higher, because it will not jar with reason. .... All religion is going beyond reason, but reason is the only guide that can get you there. Instinct is like ice, reason is the water, and inspiration is the subtlest form of vapour, one follows the other.

### **Writings :**

So with our intellect. In our desire to solve the mysteries of the universe, we cannot stop our questioning, we feel we must know, and we cannot believe that no knowledge is to be gained. A few steps and there arises a wall of beginningless and endless time which we cannot surmount. A few steps, and there arises a wall, a boundless space which cannot be surmounted, and the whole is irrevocably bound by walls of cause and effects. We cannot go beyond them. Yet we struggle, and still have to struggle. And this is Maya.

### **Writings :**

Though an atom is invisible, unthinkable, yet in it are the whole power and potency of the universe. This is exactly what the Vedantist says of the Atman. .... The world is homogenous, and modern science shows beyond doubt that each atom is composed of the same material as the whole universe. Man is the most representative being in the universe, the microcosm, a small universe in himself.

### **Writings :**

Some of these philosophers hold that the whole universe quiets down for a period. Others hold that this quieting applies only to systems, that is to say that while our system here, the solar system, will quiet down and go back into an undifferentiated state, millions of systems will go the other way and project outwards. I would rather favour the second opinion, that this quieting down is not simultaneous over the whole of the universe, and that in different parts, different things go on. But the principle remains the same, that all we see, that is, nature herself – is progressing in successive rises and falls. The one stage, falling back to balance, the perfect equilibrium, is called Pralaya, the end of a cycle. The projection and the Pralaya of the universe have been compared by theistic writers in India to the outbreathing and inbreathing of God; God, as it were, breathes out the universe, and it comes into Him again....

### **Writings of others :**

#### **Sister Nivedita :**

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting point – not only of East and West, but also past and future. If the Many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not only all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life itself is religion.

#### **A.D. Reincourt :**

At the time of the trial explosion of the first atom bomb on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1945, at the Alamogordo Desert, seeing the awesome spectacle, Robert Oppenheimer recited silently under his breath :

If the radiance of a ten thousand suns

Were to burst into the sky

That would perhaps be like

The splendour of the Might One ! (Bhagavad Gita : 11-12)

That was the moment, says A.D.Reincourt, when Western Science converged on Eastern Vedanta.

#### **Erwin Schrodinger :**

In all the world there is no kind of framework within which we find consciousness in the plural. This is simply something we construct because of the temporal plurality of the individuals. But it is a false construction. The only solution to this conflict in so far as any is available to us at all lies in the ancient wisdom of the Upanishad.

.....From the early great Upanishads, the recognition ATMAN=BRAHMAN (the personal Self called the omnipresent, all-comprehending eternal Self) was in Indian thoughts considered far from blasphemous to represent the quintessence of deepest insight into the happenings of the world. The striving of all scholars of Vedanta was, after having learnt to pronounce with their lips, really to assimilate in their minds this grandest of all thoughts.

#### **Albert Einstein :**

The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all science. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the lightest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can only comprehend only in their most primitive form - this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness. .... The deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, form my idea of God.

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