

Om is the One – Om is the Many



SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* (1.8) states: *omiti brahma, omiti-dam sarvam* – The sacred sound *Om* is *Brahman*; all this is the syllable *Om*. The mystic syllable *Om* is the choiceless point of concentration prescribed for the benefit of the student of *Vedanta*, who is constitutionally more intellectual than emotional. In their early attempts to develop a highly concentrated mind and intellect, such students too need the help of a symbol or an idea which has infinite possibilities to entertain them with its inexhaustible contents. The genius in the *Vedic* masters gave us *Om* as an 'idea-idol' to worship in the inner temple.

Excerpt from the commentary on *Taittiriya Upanishad*.

Life is a constant flow of experiences, and these experiences, when observed, are found to fall in three layers, as the experiences of the waking state, of the dream state, and of the deep sleep state. Our lives are certainly influenced by our experiences in all these different planes of consciousness, and together they have a positive influence in moulding our character and personality. This would seem slightly strange to the modern youth, because western philosophy has so far been striving to discover the fundamentals of life by an analysis and close study of merely the life available for us in our waking state. It is indeed difficult, if not almost impos-

sible, to come to a right evaluation of life and its meaning by observing only a third of its field.

When the *Rishis* observed these three fields of experiences more closely, they discovered that an individual identifying with his physical body comes to live his waking state of outer gross objects as the 'waker'.

The same entity, totally in oblivion of his body and the outer world, and exclusively identified with his mind and intellect, comes to revel in an inner world of dream and experiences subtle objects of imagination as a 'dreamer'.

When the very same entity becomes forgetful of the body and its outer world, the mind and intellect and their feelings and thoughts, he comes to experience a world of nothingness, no doubt peaceful and joyful, but conscious of nothing but 'nothingness', and becomes the 'deep sleeper'.

The dreamer's experiences are totally different and sometimes even contrary to the waker's life, and the experience of the 'deep sleeper' is common to all and seems to have no relationship with the waking and dream conditions of experiences. Yet, it is only our own experiences that we can remember – our experiences during our last waking state, the previous night's dreams and also the 'peaceful sleep' that we had afterwards. From these observations, the *Rishis* formed their bold and adventurous theory.

The law of memory is that one cannot remember the experiences of another. Whatever one can remember is the actual experience of the individual himself. The law of memory enunciates that the rememberer and the experiencer must be one and the same individual, or else memory is impossible. I can never remember any of your

past experiences, nor can you remember any of my experiences.

Applying this law of memory, we find that the 'waker', the 'dreamer' and the 'deep sleeper' are strangers among themselves, each living in his own world, and have seemingly no passport to travel beyond their own frontiers. Since we can remember all our experiences in all the three different planes, there must necessarily be a single common factor which was a witness of the experiences in all the three planes.

Let us suppose that a friend visits us one idle afternoon and starts revealing a slice of his biography, in which he explains his despairing days in Madras, his disastrous failures in Madurai, and his glorious successes in Delhi. All of us know that Madras is not Madurai, and Madurai is not Delhi. However, our friend is

describing his experiences in all the three places from his own memory. Under such circumstances, we instinctively understand that he, our friend, lived his despairing days in Madras, and himself left the Madurai-Madras zone for Delhi to reap his glorious successes.

Similarly, there must be some entity within ourselves, who is present in the 'waking world', who continues to illumine the 'dreams', who is a distant observer in the 'deep sleep world', and yet remains unconditioned by these three realms. The entity, as it were, is conceived as the 'fourth' – the real, changeless, intelligent principle behind it all.

The sages of the *Vedas*, after indicating this much to the students of *Vedanta*, want them to experience the pure subject, who becomes the 'waker' in the waking world, the 'dreamer' in the dream and the 'sleeper' in deep sleep.

The sound 'Om' is constituted of three syllables – A,U and M; and while chanting continuously the sound of Om in the mind, the *upasaka* is advised to superimpose upon these three sounds the three different planes of consciousness – the 'waking', 'dream' and 'deep sleep'. The process of superimposition is the same as the principle underlying all idol-worship – the technique by which the mighty is seen or imagined in the meagre: *Siva Tattva* in the *Siva Linga*, the divine Mother of Knowledge in the river Ganga; Sri Narayana in the *Saligrama*, Christ on the Cross!

The practitioner of meditation thus trains himself consciously to superimpose the 'waker' in him on the sound A, and then, as the sound merges with U, he gains the mental dexterity to forget totally his identity with the waking state experiences and identifies

consciously with the 'dreamer' in him, and when he comes to the sound M, he is able to black out the entire state of plurality and arrive at a state of semi-conscious experience of all negation. Thereafter his spiritual growth is assured in proportion to the intensity of his pursuit, the purity of his life and the intelligent sense of detachment he cultivates.

This practice of alert and conscious telescoping of the sounds of A, U and M, each marching into the other, is in itself an intense training in concentration of mind. The conscious folding and unfolding of the superimpositions as explained above form an equally all-absorbing occupation for the well-developed intellect. So the true practitioner, if he be sincere and regular, gains in a very short time, an infinite amount of integration, both in his mind and in his intellectual equipment.

Thereafter, the inner instruments of mind and intellect become subtle and sensitive, and dare to seek the pure awareness which illumines the objects and sustains the mirage-personalities of the 'waker', the 'dreamer' and the 'deep sleeper' in the three grosser planes of experiences. The silence between two successive sounds of *Om* is the point of concentration where the *yogi* attempts to merge with, and experience thereby, the infinite contents of one split-second, completely divorced from the past and entirely free from within and without. One second of human life is all that is needed to peep over the veil of ignorance and realize for ourselves eternally the true nature of the Self, the Godhood.

Since *Om* represents the waking, the dream and the deep-sleep states of consciousness, and since our entire life is the sum total of different experiences in all these three planes, *Om*, the symbol, represents 'all

this'. As *Om* is the symbol of the infinite Reality that is behind the seeming multiplicity and painful plurality, it becomes evident that the *Rishis* were not illogical or deliberately mystical when they declared that *Om* is 'all this universe'.

Mud is the reality. All pots of all colours, all shapes, all sizes, irrespective of their contents or conditions, are nothing but mud. Gold is the reality behind all ornaments, be they thick or thin, be they intricate or simple, be they for the neck or for the legs – they are all nothing but gold. The ocean is the reality for all the waves, be they mountainous or small, frothy or clear; all the waves are nothing but the very ocean itself. It is in this sense that *Om*, the idol of Reality, has been explained in the *mantra* here as a symbol that represents 'the entire universe', experienced outside as objects and within as thoughts and ideas. □