

MEDITATION FOR HEALTH AND MENTAL PEACE THROUGH PRANAVA-UPĀSĀNA

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The meaning of the word PRANAVA is OMKĀRA. The meditation based on Omkāra is supposed to be the oldest system of meditation. Patanjali Rsi in his Yoga Sūtras, part one, Sūtra No. 27, says that the representative word for the Iṣwara is Omkāra which is known as Pranava. When we want to worship God, it becomes very difficult as to how to worship. Different religions and different philosophies give different names to the concept of God. For coming, out of this confusion the, ancient Rsis gave Omkara as the name, the representative, symbol for Iswara as Omkāra. This type of meditation is having the oldest tradition amongst all the types of meditations. I would now explain in brief the concept of Qmkāra.

We find the history of the origin of earth in Vedas and also in the Āgama and Tantra text. They explain the history of the origin of universe in detail. The Rsis from the Āgamic side, of scriptures went in deep stage of Samādhi and experienced certain things which they have stated in their scriptures. The description is available in Kasmir Saivism. The Rsis stated in the scriptures that there is only one principle, in this universe which is known as Śiva. This Śiva is always accompanied by Sakti. The whole universe, containing a number of galaxies, having a number of stars and planets revolving around the stars, is formed out of this energy which is known as Sakti. Rsis stated in the scriptures that the nature of the' Sakti is sound and this s01md is nothing else but some what nearer to Omkāra. Hence, behind the entire creation of all the planets and, stars the basic component behind the creation is Omkāra. On our planet we are seeing a number of small and big species like Creatures in the water, animals, human beings etc. They are having an inbuilt mechanism of the sound of Om. This is what can be called as the historical background of Omkāra.

DEFINITION OF OMKĀRA

We find the definition of Omkāra in a number of Upanisads and other texts as stated below. In Praśnopanisad, Pippālada Rsi explains in detail the definition of Omkāra to his disciple Satyakāma. Rsi states that this Omkāra is Part and Aparā Brahman. Similar discussions are also found in other Upanisads such as Taitariyopanisad etc. and also in Jñānesvari at a number of places.

The Kathopanisad, in Mantra No. 1.2.60, states that this Omkāra word is the representative of Brahman. The Prasnopanisad, in Mantra No. 5.2, states that this Omkāra is Para and Aparā Brahma. TaiHiriya Upanisad, in Mantra No. 7.8.1, states that Om itself is Brahma. Bhagavat-Gita, in verse No. 8.13, states that this Om can be stated as Brahma only. Chāndogya Upanisad, in Mantra No. 1.1.1, states that one should offer prayers only to this OM.

EXPLANATION OF OMKĀRĀ ACCORDING TO MANDUKYOPANISAD.

This Upanisad is having only twelve Mantras. This is very old Upanisad. Bhagawana Rama, while

explaining to Hanumāna stated that this Upanisad can lead him towards Mukti or Kaivalya. This Upanisad explains the meaning of Omkāra only. “The author of this Upanisad divides Omkāra in four stages. These four pans can be treated as the four stages of the soul or the Ātman is experiencing the external objects of the word in the awakened (Jāgrat) state. In this state he is enjoying all the pleasure which the man is getting. This stage of Ātman is supposed to be externally oriented.

The second stage of Omkāra is, when the man is in the dreaming stage. In this stage the soul is experiencing certain things which can be called as internal or they are related to the mind, both conscious and subconscious. The soul is experiencing all the dreams which the man is getting. In this stage the activities of the soul are restricted. However, its existence in this stage is restricted to the dream stage only.

The third state of Omkāra is known as Susupti. In this state man is enjoying a deep sleep. In this stage there are no dreams. This stage is supposed to be full of Joy. This is a stage which lasts for a very short time. In this state the existence of the Ātman is there and the person after this stage says that he has experienced best sleep. Here the experience is the soul only.

The fourth stage of Omkāra is known as Turiya (fourth) state. In this state man crosses the boundaries of mind and is nearest to the soul. In other words we can say that he comes nearest to Ātman. This is supposed to be the highest state of the Omkāra. This is possible for Yogis and the aspirants of the highest stage. Here no duality exists. This is the lowest or almost nil form of physical activity.

In this way the Upanisad explains four stages of Omkāra and this Omkāra has been equated to the soul only. Since the soul in its purest form is a part and parcel of Brahman, the Omkāra is equated as the representative of Brahman. Hence, the author of Māndukya Upanisad justifies the principles of Omkāra as mentioned above.

THE GROSS FORM OF OMKĀRA

Omkāra is formed out of two vowels and one consonant namely A, U and M respectively. Besides that there is also a dot placed above. Two vowels and one consonant are known as three Mātrās and the dot is considered to be half Mātrā. Hence, Omkāra is formed out of three and half Mātrās. The interpretation of these 3.5 Mātrās has been mentioned by Gaudapādācārya in his connotation of Mandukya Upanisad by verse No. 1.23. He says that the Akāra leads up to the external world. the Ukāra takes us towards the Teja Tattva and the Makāra takes us towards the knowledge. In this way, these three Mātrās are having the capacity to make understand the external and internal world. However, after the understanding of the external world the aspirant has to understand the inner world also. This inner world can be experienced only in a thoughtless stage. This thoughtless stage is known as Turiya stage. The remaining half Mātrā leads the aspirant towards Turiya stage. In this way the Omkāra is having the capacity to make the aspirant understand the external as well as internal world. That is why it is supposed to be the highest form of Mantra and Upāsana.

There are different styles of writing Omkāra. This has been explained in detail in the book Omkāra Kimayā written by Dr. Devadhar. The Omkāra can be pronounced loudly, slowly, extremely slowly or without uttering any word. This will be discussed at a later stage.

THE SUBTLE NATURE OF OMKĀRA

We are finding a very interesting incident in one of the ten ancient Upanishads known as Prasopanisad.

A few aspirants namely Sukesha, Satyakāma, Sauryāni, Kausalya, Vaidharbhi and Kātyāyan approached one senior Rsi Pippalāda. During the course of discussions the senior Rsi Pippalāda said that, O aspirants this Omkāra is Para and Aparā Bhrahman. He wanted to emphasize that the experience of Bhrahman is possible only through Omkāra. The Rsi further states that this Bhrahman is every thing and it is occupying the whole world. If one wants to experience Bhrahman there is no other way, except Omkāra Upāsanā. This has been discussed in Prasnopanisad V2. Similar explanation is also found in Taittiriopanisad. The author of this Upanisad also states that Om is Bhrahman and Bhrahman is Om. Similar explanation also has been given in Jnānesvari in chapter VIII. For experiencing the extra sensory perception, it is most essential that we have to develop our senses in such a manner that they become more and more subtle. Our five organs (Karmendriyas) and five senses (Jnānendriyas) are all externally oriented. The aspirant has to make practice in such a way that he reverses the external direction and goes towards the inner direction. After sufficient practice the aspirant goes beyond all these external organs and the senses. In short he goes beyond the body consciousness. At this stage he can start experiencing the extra sensory perceptions with the help of Omkāra Sadhānā.

There are four methods of uttering any word (Vani), which are known as Vaikhari, Madhyamā, Pasyanti and Para. When we utter the word loudly it is known as Vaikhari. When we utter the word very slowly without making any sound, that is known as Madhyamā. When we do not make use of our tongue and throat and utter the word from the mind, it is known as Pasyanti. When we do not make use of the mind also and try to express the word from our inner consciousness, it is known. Para-Vani. For getting better results out of Omkāra Sādhanā, in is most essential for the aspirant that he has to practice Omkāra gradually from the first stage to the fourth stage. The practice has to be started by uttering Omkāra loudly and during the course of time this Omkāra has to be uttered silently till he reaches the third stage which is known as Pasyanti. The fourth stage of the utterance that is Para Vani is possible only for great Yogis. Hence the aspirant must understand that the beter results are obtained be making the sould of Omkāra more than more subtle.

SOME OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT OMKĀRA

Verse No. 16 and 17th of the first chapter of Kathopanisad describes the importance of Omkāra. The verses state that Omkāra is the supreme word. If this word is understood in the real sense, nothing remains to be understood in the real sense, nothing remains to be understood in this world. Hence, the author of this Upanisad states that the aspirant has to take the help of this word. This word is responsible for the aspirants for experiencing the highest experience, known as Bhrahman. When the Kundalini energy is activated the aspirants start listening the sound of Omkāra without uttering the same. This can be stated as the sound emerging out of super consciousness or Para-Vani. Even Vedas say that this Omkāra is the ultimate and is representative of Bhrahman. That is why Omkāra. This Upāsanā of Omkāra is known as Pranava Upāsanā.

The aspirants start feeling the vibration of Omkāra in all the Cakras at the advanced state of his Upāsanā. With this Pranava Upāsanā, all the diseases of the aspirant disappear. The face of the aspirant becomes shining and dazzling. His capacities of all sense organs increase to a very great extent. His intellect and memory also increase. The aspirant becomes on the whole internally oriented. When he proceeds on this path, during the deep stage of meditation he can listen a number of sounds such as the



sound of flute, sound of bells, sound of trumpet etc. His breathing, during the highest stages, comes to a minimum stage or almost nil stage. Hence, this stage is supposed to be an ideal stage of the meditation. When the Sābhaka starts listening the sound of Omkāra, without uttering the same, this is known as Anābata Nāda. This Nāda comes from the heart Cakra. This Anābata sound is of ten type i.e. in the Bhrahma Randhra, all these sounds are coming naturally.

Yoga-Sikhopanisad describes a number of aspects of Omkāra in its chapter No. III. The author of this Upanisad states that with Pranava Sābhanā the aspirant is in a position to get a number of Siddhis. He can cross the boundaries of life and death. The author gives example of a seed. The seed when sown into the soil develops in a large tree. In similar way if this Omkāra is sown in your inner consciousness in the Mulādhāra Cakra, this can develop into a, tremendous source of energy which is nothing else but the light of your soul

OMKĀRA UPĀSANĀ (How to practice)

There are various systems of Omkāra Upāsanā. However the aspirant should start his Japa from the first stage which is known as the Trātaka System which is as under.

Take a piece of square plain white paper or white cloth. Write on the centre of the paper or cloth Omkāra with orange colour. Fix that paper or the cloth on the wall at a height equivalent to the height of your eyes, when you are in a sitting posture. While sitting for this practice, you must observe specific timing. The preferable timings are either morning or evening. Sit in front of that Omkāra picture keeping a distance of about 1.5 feet. Utter Omkāra 108 times loudly, keeping your eyes staring at the Omkara picture. Then close your eyes. Then imagine that this Omkāra picture is within your brain and then try to visualize the same in your heart Cakra. After some time try to visualize the same at your naval centre.

By this practice the aspirant develops the art of concentration and hence, his thoughts are automatically reduced and the mind is having a single thought of Omkār. For the beginners it is advisable that he should start his Upāsanā by the process as mentioned above.

Once the aspirant develops this practice, he should go towards the next stage. In this stage he should sit for meditation with closed eyes and repeat the Omkāra sound loudly for 108 times. Like this he should do three cycles both in the morning and the evening. Once he develops sufficient practice, he should go towards the next stage.

In this stage the aspirant should utter the Omkāra very slowly, so that he alone can listen that sound. This practice also should continue both times morning and evening for about a month. After sufficient practice, the aspirant should feel the vibrations of Omkara near his heart centre.

In the next stage the aspirant should utter the Omkāra without making any sound. That means he has to utter the same in his mind only. It is to be remembered that as and when the sound of the Omkara becomes lesser and lesser, the effects increase more and more. Hence, the aspirant has to make sufficient practice of this Upāsana of chanting Omkāra in his mind only. He can experience a number of advantages both on physical and mental level by this U pāsānā.

The last stage of this Upāsanā is to be practiced only by the aspirants of very high level. With the stages



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as mentioned above it so happens that the sound of Omkāra becomes part and parcel of his own personality. In this stage the aspirant has not to utter Omkāra by his mind. Now his inner subconscious would start chanting the same with the help of his mind. This stage is known as the right, stage and it is called Ajapājapa. In this stage the aspirant is not doing any chanting (japa). The Omkār Japa is being continued in his subconscious level. He must undergo this practice for a sufficiently long time. He should sit for the meditation and practice this Ajapajapa. This would be the best type of meditation. He would be in a thoughtless stage. He would be only with the sound of Omkāra.

After sufficient practice, it so happens that this Omkāra Japa stops and the aspirant starts listening the sound of Omkāra from the heart centre. This sound is known as Anāhata Nāda. This is the sound of the Omkāra only. Every aspirant should try to go towards higher and higher stages as mentioned above. This type of meditation helps the aspirant at both the physical and mental level. Hence, this meditation is supposed to be one of the best types of meditation. This meditation helps in the awakening of the Kundalini energy. After sufficient practice, the first Cakra which is known as Mulādhāra Cakra gets activated. The aspirant feels the vibration of this Cakra. As and when the practice progresses, the further Cakras such as Swādhistbāna, Manipura etc., are also activated. The aspirant, during this type of meditation gets spiritually elevated to a very great extent. Hence, this type of meditation is having multiple advantages. That is why our scriptures say that Pranava Upāsānā is supposed to be highest type of meditation. Uddālaka Rsi reached the ultimate stage of Moksa, with the help of Omkāra Upāsānā. This is explained in detail in Yoga- Vasistha chapter Upāsānā sarga 54.
