

**OM**  
**The Auspicious Monosyllable**  
(Its Science and Practice)



**Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha**

OM - The Auspicious Monosyllable -  
Its Science and Practice

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## *To the Readers*

Blessed Reader,

We have great pleasure in reprinting this booklet, a unique one of its nature and scope. The booklet has been in good demand for some time now.

While giving an exhaustive theoretical presentation of OM, its various aspects and how it is a combination of all sounds which emerge from the human, Swamiji has made particular stress on how the chanting of OM can take one to the spiritual world of joy and beauty.

Any reader with an open mind will find this booklet enlightening and at the same time enjoyable. The rumination over the ideas presented in this booklet will definitely make the sincere reader more spiritual and we have no doubt that he will progress in his wisdom and seeking.

**Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha**

23 July 1975

Narayanashrama Tapovanam

## Foreword

During his visit to Jamshedpur in October this year, Poojya Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha gave an excellent and exhaustive dissertation on the philosophical meaning and the spiritual significance of the mystic Symbol 'OM'. This lecture, which was highly appreciated for its clarity of thought and force of expression, is being presented in the book form for the benefit of all devotees and seekers.

Knowledge is the derivative of ideas. Ideation is done in language. Language is the product and outcome of sound and its combinations. This auspicious symbol or syllable

OM, comprising the sounds (A), (U), and (IM)<sup>\*</sup> - the first, intermediate and the last sounds produced by the human vocal system, *is a representative composite* of all the sounds producible by him. On this account, it also becomes a representative of all our concepts, ideas and thoughts possible of evolution at any time, in the past, in the present as well as in the future. Thus the monosyllable encompasses within it the entire gamut of knowledge that exists, or that can possibly exist, for man.

The term "consciousness" mentioned several times in the book, is a source of confusion to many. In ordinary parlance, consciousness means the waking state of the mind, when a person remains aware of his surroundings and is able to react to external stimuli. It is not in this sense that the term "consciousness" is used in this book, but in its philosophical concept, which implies the *Supreme*

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\* अ, उ and इम्

*consciousness*. This *Supreme Consciousness* is described by different schools of philosophers as the Spirit, the God-entity, the Supreme Intelligence, etc., which permeates the entire objective universe, including the human body. It is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe. It is also the source, substance and power, from which, in which and by which all the states, activities, etc., internal and external, of the human take place.

The human consciousness, viz. the state of awareness, is but a derivative or product of this Supreme Consciousness, brought about when the latter reacts with certain centres of the human brain and then manifests itself. When this contact is withdrawn from these nerve centres, as a natural sequel and by the will of the Supreme Consciousness itself, the state of sleep ensues. When this contact is forcibly separated, as by administering an anesthetic, or excess of alcohol or by injury, the state of unconsciousness, or "coma", results. In the dream state, there is a partial withdrawal of the Supreme Consciousness.

We trust that this clarification may help to dispel any confusion relating to the term "consciousness". We also hope that this delightful booklet will help all sincere seekers in their pursuit of Truth.

**Devotees and Students of Poojya Swamiji**

**Jamshedpur**

**25<sup>th</sup> October 1969**



## **The Auspicious Monosyllable** (Its Science and Practice)

The one factor which distinguishes the human being from the rest of the creatures in the world is the faculty and *power of speech* which the former possesses. The power of speech enables the humans to communicate among themselves. This communication itself has its origin in knowledge and it also helps development of knowledge.

Let us see how the power of speech itself evolves and what significance and influence does it hold on our life, activities and pursuits.

Think of a child that has just been delivered. The moment it comes out of the mother's womb and its skin touches the floor, it gives vent to a certain reaction, the manifest form of which is crying, the expression of sound, the revelation of the power of speech. I believe this reaction is the result of the first sensation which the child gets when its skin, which until then was used to the warmth of its mother's body, touches the floor which is cold. That is to say, the child has sensed a difference between the place in which it was before and the place in which it lies now. Sensing thus the

difference between heat and cold, marks the beginning point of its life upon earth.

From then on the child goes on deriving more and more sensations brought about by, not merely the skin but the other sense organs like the ear, eye, etc., as well. If you observe small babies you will find them keeping the eyes open for a number of minutes or even hours at a stretch. In other words, they do not wink their eyes off and on, as do the grownups. May be, the child is trying to sense the various objects, colourful by nature and thereby forming impressions in its mind about the different colours and the colourful objects. The eye is the most important of all the senses. It is the most perceptive of all. The range of perception of the eye, according to ophthalmological science, is limitless. I heard from an eye-specialist that the *far point of the eye is infinity*.

Next to eye, comes the ear. Sensing the world objects through the eye consistently for a fairly long period, the child develops its capacity to distinguish the mother's face from the rest of the objects and bodies. This becomes possible for the child, because the mother's body has got its specific colour and features, which differ from those of the rest. Looking at the mother, father etc., the child is able to notice the movement of their lips, teeth, tongue, etc. The reading by the eye thus coupled with the reading which the ear does of the sounds issuing from the mouths (of the parents),

spontaneously give rise to the power of speech of the child, which it gives expression to gradually, in degrees.

As the colours and shapes of the objects enter through the eyes into the child's consciousness within the body and form lasting impressions therein, so also the sounds and sound combinations too enter its within through the ears and form their own respective impressions. These impressions, the primary ones, along with the other sets of impressions brought about by the other senses, namely the skin, tongue and the nose, combine themselves variously, and their resultant effect is what we describe as *knowledge*. It is the knowledge, thus developed, that truly gives rise to all the activities, of the *jnaanendriyas* and *karmendriyas*, as is the case with the first activity, namely crying, of the newborn child when its skin touches the floor and thereby it senses coldness.

What I try to say is that it is the sensations, which give rise to and express themselves as *knowledge* in us, and it is from the *knowledge* so derived that every activity of ours emerges.

What is *knowledge* in essence? Knowledge is the extension or collection of ideas, ideas which have their primary foundation on sound-combinations. Closely viewed, what we refer to or imply by the use of letters, words, sentences and the like, are they not the various sound combinations? Each sound is either a vowel or a



consonant. And every vowel-consonant unit is a letter. And every letter, by itself, or in conjunction with one or more such others, becomes an idea. Every idea by itself denotes knowledge. Truly, idea and knowledge are the same. Thus, where sound combinations and their evolution and progress do not take place, there knowledge also cannot be.

Knowledge is something that arises in the within, namely the consciousness or the mind. Sound combinations are something which become audible, which issue forth from the within. Although it is the vocal cords, tongue, mouth, etc., that are instrumental in producing sound combinations, the motive force for their operation comes absolutely from the within, from the consciousness that exists within the body. Thus, just as there is an inseparable relationship between the fragrance which issues forth from a flower and the flower itself, again just as there is an inseparable bond between fire and its brilliance, there is an inseparable relation between the words uttered by our mouth and the vibrations of our consciousness (due to which the words themselves get formed.) This inseparable relationship being there, it naturally follows that a right handling of sound combinations or say our speech as a whole, will also imply a right handling of the consciousness within. The handling of speech is something quite possible, it is quite within the reach of any ordinary human, whereas this is not the case with the consciousness. Consciousness is not a thing sensory,

it is not feelable or experienceable by any of the senses, but speech is completely sensory, it is audible to the ear. How can you handle a thing which eludes your notice, which lies beyond the range of your ordinary experience?

The discussion of OM which is a unique sound combination becomes relevant and meaningful, because being a form of speech or a kind of sound combination, it has its inseparable connection with the working of the consciousness within.

We have already said that it is the factor of knowledge, which is constantly at play in the humans that distinguishes them from the rest of the beings. It is also true that what shapes our life, what gives rise to all kinds of activity in us at all the times, is essentially the knowledge in us. Again, the ultimate outcome of all activities, whether they are external or internal, whether sensory or otherwise is the begetting of knowledge alone. A man who *knows that he is a man* behaves like a man. One who *knows* that she is a woman behaves like a woman. He who has earned riches *knows* that he is rich. One to whom a son is born *knows* that he has a son and also *that he is a father*. Thus it is from knowledge that our life proceeds and it is in knowledge that it persists throughout and ultimately finds its consummation as well.

This knowledge which is really the nature of our life

has its full bearing upon the power of speech which we constantly give expression to.

Knowledge which is based upon our speech can be analysed and found to have an origin, a development or existence, then again an end. It is akin to the origin, existence and dissolution of the world. We think of God as the source of origin, existence and dissolution of the world. Similarly, there is an origin, extension and dissolution of the various sound combinations also.

Sound emerges forth when we open our mouth. That sound which we produce with our mouth wide open is the A (अ). So (A) is the beginning point of all sounds, all sound combinations, that is to say, of all letters and words. It is considered to be the first vowel.

All sounds cease when we close our mouth. With our mouth closed a sound can be produced and that is what goes by the name *humming*. The humming or *anuswar* is denoted by IM (इम).

Between these two, that is to say, the beginning and end points, between the (A) and the (IM) all the other sound combinations have their origin. In other words, it is by not keeping the mouth wide open and then again not closing it fully that you produce all the other sounds, letters, etc. The sound that represents thus the entire intermediate sound combinations is U (उ). In uttering the (U) you keep your mouth partly open and in a way

partly closed too. This position relates to all the various sound expressions other than (A) which we can utter when the mouth is kept wide open.

You will now agree that the evolution and transmission of *knowledge* virtually means the evolution and transmission of *sound* and its *combinations*. The knowing process (or the thought-flow) is inextricably linked with the sound-working process. In the absence of the latter, the former cannot also have been. Hence, it will be right for us to regard all possible knowledge as lying within the A-U-IM range. This fact is what makes the monosyllable OM supremely unique and all-comprehensive. OM stands before us as an external (audible) representative of the internal mind and its invisible working.

The OM is a combination of the three different utterances or sounds namely A, U and IM. Although these three different sounds combine themselves, the resultant combination is something quite different from any or all of them, also quite unique and new. Unless somebody says that OM is a combination of these three components, it is not possible for us to know about that truth. Again, in the OM you find a unique blending of all the three different component sounds. Nevertheless, the blending gives rise to something new and more.

This exactly is the truth, in regard to the three states of our mind also, which mark our life, existence and

activities in the world.

Most of us consider that the body is the basic factor of our life and activities. But true discrimination will tell us that the body is nothing but a mere mass of flesh, inert and inactive, if the presence of the consciousness is not there in it.

In fact, we consider a person *dead* when the operation of the mind in his body ceases. This is ample enough to prove that it is the existence and function of the mind which really goes by the name *life*.

In other words, in our personality the mental part, or the mind's existence, is the *primary factor* and the physical part or the body's existence is only the *secondary one*. Throughout our life, that is to say, in all our activity and also in the process of knowing and experiencing, it is the primary factor, namely the mind, that gets involved *first* and *foremost*. *And hence, it is the mental functions which have to be touched up, regularized and refined*. But because the mind is (1) a thing extremely subtle and (2) is situated within the body, it becomes greatly difficult for us to know about its nature, features, etc., more so to handle it as we want. The more subtle a thing, the more difficult it is to get at it and handle it. The more gross or sensory a thing, the greater is its accessibility, the greater is the scope for us to handle it.

You will now understand that the spiritual seekers cannot hope to handle their mind properly all of a sudden. Naturally, the question arises as to what is the next source or factor which they should lay their hands upon. Sound being the first distinct expression which the mind or the consciousness within gives rise to, the answer is that it is upon sound that they should lay their hands upon. In other words, *handling of the sound*, being something comparatively *easy* and *feasible* is what they should *first* attempt, in their effort to reach at the mind.

Every working of the mind involves the production or creation of ideas on the one hand, and of emotions and sentiments on the other. The emotions and sentiments, when closely viewed, can again be attributed to their *respective ideas*. For emotions and sentiments are *the offshoots of ideas* or ideations. That is to say, all kinds of agitation, misery, doubts and the like have their origin in one kind of idea (knowledge) or the other, arising in the mental level. So if we want to *achieve freedom* from agitation, misery and doubt what we have to do is to *keep the mind away* from its agitation producing, misery producing as well as the doubt producing functions. This virtually means the cessation of the mind's working. How can the mind which is constantly *used to thinking or functioning or ideating or knowing*, in one way or the other, be brought to a state of cessation or stillness? The stillness is quite opposed to its present nature. Mind's function, its continuance, can only mean

*the opposite of stillness. It is thus that we face a riddle. How to resolve it?!*

All riddles have their specific solutions. The mind or the intelligence which poses the riddles can as well resolve them. If any particular riddle cannot be resolved, at least it can be dissolved.

OM is a combination of sounds. Unlike the so many other sounds which are broadly classified as A (अ), U (उ) and IM (इम), the sound combination OM has got a beginning, a middle and an end, all the three in full. That is to say, it is a wholesome, complete or comprehensive sound combination. It is even true to say that it is an all-comprehensive sound combination. Just like God encompasses within His being the evolution, the existence or extension, and also the dissolution of the universe, the mystic monosyllable OM comprehends within it – the evolution, extension or existence and also the dissolution *of the entire sound-world*. This virtually means it comprehends within itself the evolution, existence and dissolution of the entire thinking or knowing process, because the sound process *is an effect as well as cause* of the knowledge-process, they both are inextricably inter-linked.

At the same time, the utterance of OM does not produce any idea. It does not generate any kind of thought or knowledge which can possibly bring along with it any agitation, misery or doubt. Doubt, misery or agitation

can arise only when the mind ideates. In the absence of ideation, there cannot be the resultant effects, namely doubt, misery and agitation.

It is difficult for us to engage or involve, the mind in such a manner whereby it will not ideate and hence will not also bring the resultant unpleasant experiences. But this difficulty you can safely overcome, once you take to the utterance of OM, as I shall show you now.

When you start chanting OM loudly, the mind will perforce start vibrating and beaming along with it. The mind will, say, start functioning or thinking likewise, but to produce what thought? What vibration? To produce the OM thought, the OM vibration. Inasmuch as such a thought or vibration does not imply, denote, any so-called idea or knowledge, the resultant effects like doubt, misery and agitation, as arise in the case of ordinary thinking or function, cannot be there.

OM is a sound combination which you can chant loudly in slow pace, in a long drawn manner. When so chanted or recited, it will also cause the mind to vibrate alike in the process. The vibration so caused will consist of: (1) a beginning, marked by an upsurge or emergence of the consciousness, of the mind, (2) then by a middle, marked by an extension of this upsurge, and (3) finally an end, marked by a subsidence or dissolution of the middle state of the extension. In spite of thus a full, long, vibration taking place in the mind, it involves *no*



*thinking at all* and therefore, none of the resultant effects also is possible.

If, by means of the OM chanting or utterance, the mind is thus kept engaged for a few minutes unbrokenly, you will feel a kind of quietitude and peacefulness within you, in the mind's level, the like of which you will not have experienced during the entire course of your life then far. Because life and activity are always underscored by the

- ideating,
- reacting
- knowing

functions of the mind. Whereas here now comes to you a stage, a state, where the mind is awake, but is entirely free of thoughts and reactions. Truly speaking, this is the transcendental state, the state of the *self-resplendent Self*, wherein it shines freely and unassociatedly.

There is also another significance about the nature and purpose of the OM sound combination.

Mind, upon the existence and functions of which our entire life depends, has got three different states. They are the waking (*jagrat*), sleep (*sushupti*) and dream (*swapna*). Only if we know that there are thus these three states, and thereupon we try to compare our

wakefulness with the other two states, our knowledge stands the chance of improving itself in all respects and thereby of consummating or fulfilling itself. One will start progressing in his spiritual path only when his knowledge takes into account the existence of these three states of the mind, and consequently the relative and incomplete nature of the *jagrat* is clearly felt by him. In the same way, he must also draw the lessons which the *sushupti* and *swapna* states give in relation to the *jagrat*. Truly, it is clear grasping of the significance of all the three states that enables the seeker to ascend to lofty spiritual heights. But the sad fact is that at present we pay attention *only* to our wakeful state and *ignore* the other two states.

Leave alone the question of the Soul. Likewise, leave also the question of God, for the time being. That there is the Soul or that there is God, this idea itself *arises only when we are awake*, only we remain in our waking state. With the disappearance of the wakeful state subsequent to our entry into the sleep state, along with all other ideas and questions, the idea of the Soul and the question about God also vanish. Nevertheless, are not we happy, are not we free from all worldly miseries and agitations during that state? Sleep clearly shows to us that there is a state of existence in which we can be for hours together, during which the mind functions not, and thereby we are able to remain free and peaceful. Once this truth about the sleep state is clearly grasped, all that need be done is to *bring in* the state of *sleep* while

we yet *remain awake*. This becomes necessary because sleep by itself is a condition or state wherein unlike in the waking, we are *not able to know* "I am asleep". In wakefulness the "I am wakeful" knowledge persists throughout. That is why I said "*all that need be done is to bring in the state of sleep while we yet remain awake.*" When such a *wakeful sleep* or a *sleepy wakefulness* can be brought about, it will be found to be a *perfect solution* for all our present miseries, agitations and doubts. That will be a state wherein the mind sees itself, feels itself and thereby delights in itself.

The sound A (अ), the first component of the combination OM, represents the wakeful state of the mind. The IM (इम), the last component of the combination, represents the state of sleep where the mind remains unmodified and indistinct. The sound IM does not denote anything in particular except that it is a sound audible. You cannot particularise it in any way. In the same manner, except that the sleep is an existent state you cannot particularise it this way or that. That is why the IM is said to be denoting or representing the sleep state.

There is another component, the middle one, namely the U (उ). This, truly speaking, represents the dream state. What is in fact dream? It is no more than a *becoming* of the mind, a modification of it. The mind existing within the body assumes the nature of the entire dream phenomena, and after so assuming it goes

on experiencing them. That is to say, on the one hand it is the creator, on the other hand it is the created and again on the other it is the enjoyer and sufferer of the creation, of the effects of creation. In other words, the mind first of all becomes the dream phenomena and thereupon it cognizes them too, remaining apart. To put it in short, *the mind experiences itself* during the dream. This is quite unlike what transpires in sleep and wakefulness. In sleep, obviously you are not *currently aware of* the mental state. In the wakeful condition, although you are aware of the wakefulness, you are sensing so many things outside which are not created by you. But this is not the case with dream. The dream phenomena are created by the mind itself.

Compare these three states with three different components of OM. The three different components combine themselves in such a manner as to produce something entirely new and unique. The combination, so produced, contains, when closely viewed, the nuclei of all the three components and also something beyond.

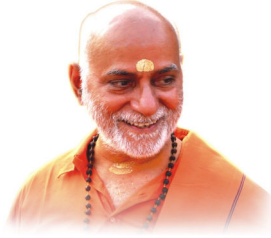
Similarly, there is a *fourth state* of the mind, which you can bring about by combining the three component states, namely, waking, dream and sleep. It is this fourth state which is referred to as the *Thuria* (*chathurtham*) (चतुर्थ) and then described as “*santam, sivam, advaitam, prapanchopasamam*” - शान्तं, शिवं, अद्वैतं, प्रपञ्चोपशमं (the peaceful, auspicious, the singular or the non-dual, the world-dissolving) etc.

By uttering OM loudly and long, and in the process also listening to the utterance attentively, the mind can be made to exert itself in a *spiritual manner*, the ultimate result of which exertion will be *the dissolution of the very mental function itself*. This dissolution is akin to the state of sleep. At the same time, because the dissolution is accomplished in the wakeful state itself, it will not have the shortcoming of the *sushupthi state*. On the other hand, you will be able to *experience* the dissolution. Again such a mind-dissolved state is akin to the dream state in the sense that, as the mind experiences the dream phenomena created by itself, here in the *thuria* achieved by the utterance of and simultaneous contemplation on OM, the mind, remaining wakeful, realizes or experiences the dissolved state. And, needless to say, the wakeful state also is there within it, for the reason that you are currently aware of, you know what transpires.

It is thus that the OM is considered to be a full representative of the fourth state, *thuria*. The three components A, U and IM (अ, उ and इम) combine themselves to form a *wonderfully new* sound combination which beams forth with energy but nevertheless denotes no idea whatever of the world. Similarly, the fourth state of consciousness, the *thuria* is one wherein the waking, the sleep and the dream combine themselves to form a combination which is wholesome, *nevertheless spiritual and transcendental*.

May you, the genuine seekers and enquirers, take to the practice of OM, and attain the *thuria* thereby gaining a full vision and knowledge of the transcendental Self as also the much coveted spiritual goal of salvation in this very life.

*Hariḥ Om Tat Sat.*



Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha, a knower of the Supreme Truth, has guided numerous seekers towards the invaluable goal of Self-realization, transforming their lives into one of joy and contentment. Swamiji's interpretation of Bhagavadgītā, āreemad Bhīgavatam, Upanishads and other spiritual texts, coming from his experiential depth and mastery of Self-realization, inspires seekers with the liberating touch of the transcendental knowledge.

Receiving *deeksha* (spiritual initiation) from Baba Gangadhara Paramahansa of Dakshinkhanda, West Bengal, Swamiji embraced sannyāsa at the age of 23. Dedicating his life for the welfare of mankind, he has been relentlessly disseminating spiritual wisdom of Vedanta for over 50 years, with rare clarity, practicality and openness, to seekers all over the world.



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