

1: What is the significance of chanting OM?

OM is the primary sound of all sounds. All five elements produce this sound. It is the Primordial sound. The sound of 'OM' represents the entire content of the Absolute – the Sound of creation. It allows us to establish a relationship with the Divine, achieve unity with the Divine, and help us turn to the inward path.

Bhagavan Baba says, OM is a Name of God which finds universal acceptance. The Christians say Amen in their prayers every day. It is only a different form of OM. OM has universal relevance and applicability. It cuts across all barriers of time, place, religion and culture, and can be uttered by all men.

OM is a composite of three sounds (AUM). A (aa) arising from the region of the nasal, U (oo) flowing through the throat and tongue, and M (mm) ending up at the closed lips. It has to be pronounced rising in a crescendo as slowly as possible and as slowly coming down. After the M(mm) there will be the echo of the silence reverberating in the cavity of the heart. The sound effect must be like an aircraft, approaching from a distance – low at first but gradually becoming louder and then slowly relapsing into silence, a silence that is felt and experienced.

2: Make the place where you are a citadel of silence

You need not escape into a forest to gain silence and the chance of uninterrupted spiritual practice. You can make the place where you are a citadel of silence; shut off the senses, let them not run after objects. Your home becomes a hermitage; your spiritual practices will then move on, without any obstacles.

Spend a few minutes every morning and evening in the silence of your own shrine or home; spend them with the highest of all the powers that you know of. Be in His elevating and inspiring company; worship Him mentally; offer unto Him all the work you do; you will come out of the silence nobler and more heroic than when you went in.

3: Three kinds of silence

The ancients practised three kinds of silence. The first was silence of the tongue, the second one was silence of the mind, and the third was supreme silence. Silence in speech meant confining one's speech to the limit and the needs of the occasion. By this discipline, excessive talk was avoided. As a result, the power of their speech was conserved and enhanced. Discipline in speech also resulted in truthfulness. Speaking the truth served to purify their thoughts. By this means they acquired the highest wisdom. Therefore purity in speech is vital. It has to be achieved by restraint in speech. Then, there is silence of the mind. The mind is a bundle of thoughts and fancies. These thoughts have to be reduced gradually. When thoughts are reduced, the mind naturally comes under control, like a clock that is unwound. When the activity of the mind is reduced, the power of the Atma manifests itself. As a consequence, intellect becomes more active than the senses. When control of speech and control of the mind have been achieved, the state of supreme silence is easily realised.

4: Cultivate inner silence

The very first spiritual practice one must adopt is the cultivation of inner silence, to put an end to the endless dialogue with the mind. Let the mind rest for a while. Do not project on the mind irrelevant details and pollute it with fumes of envy and greed. Every idea we entertain, either good or bad, gets impressed on the mind, as on carbon paper. An element of weakness and unsteadiness is thus introduced in the mind. Keep the mind calm and clear. Do not agitate it every moment by your non-stop dialogue. Bhagavan Baba reminded us not to mistake a stone to be a diamond merely because of its glitter. A diamond is different from a stone. What is the real diamond? 'Die-mind' is the true diamond.

5: Silence is the speech of the spiritual seeker

One of the first principles of straight living is the practice of silence. For the voice of God can be heard in the region of your heart when the tongue is stilled and the storm is tilled and the waves are calm. There will be no temptations for others to shout when you talk to them in whispers. Set the level of the tone yourself; as low as possible, as high as necessary to reach the outermost boundary of the circle you are addressing. Conserve sound, since it is the treasure of the element akasa, an emanation from God Himself.

Reason can prevail only when arguments are advanced without the whipping up of sound. Silence is the speech of the spiritual seeker. Soft sweet speech is the expression of genuine love. Hate screeches, fear squeals, conceit trumpets. But love sings lullabies. It soothes. It applies balm. Practice the vocabulary of love; unlearn the language of hate and contempt.

6: It is only in the depth of silence that the voice of God can be heard

Speak as low as possible, as little as possible, as sweetly as possible. You feel the presence of God when silence reigns. In the excitement and confusion of the market place, you cannot hear His footfall. He is Sabdabrahma, resounding when all is filled with silence. That is why I insist on silence, the practice of low speech and minimum sound. Talk low, talk little, talk in whispers, sweet and true. Examine each act of yours and see that you execute it with minimum noise. Do not shout to a person standing far; go near him or beckon to him to approach you. Loud noise is sacrilege on the sky, just as there are sacrilegious uses of earth and of water. Close your eyes tightly, you will hear the sound 'OM' from within. God proclaims, "O devotees! You see with physical eyes and listen with physical ears. Be in utter silence, you can listen to the footsteps of God".

7: Solitude means to be in communion with God

God is the embodiment of truth. Truth is God. Therefore you should rely on truth. In fact, you are the embodiment of truth. It is not something new to be discovered afresh. Truth will manifest in you if you sit in deep silence and solitude. What does the word "solitude" mean? People have wrong notions about this word and misinterpret it in many ways. They think that sitting alone in a room with all doors and windows shut is solitude. This is not solitude but loneliness. Many others think that sitting under a tree in a forest or in a mountain cave is solitude. That also is not the true meaning of solitude.

Solitude means to be in communion with God, wherever you may be – in the bazaar, in a meeting, or in the midst of a large number of people. Wherever you are, your mind should be focused on God without being distracted by worldly and family matters. Solitude is total communion between you and God. Nothing else should divert your attention from God. That is the real meaning of solitude. Whatever you may be doing or even when traveling on a bus or train or plane, always keep your mind firmly fixed on God. While doing meditation or contemplating on God, do not allow any other distraction to divert your mind. Only then can you have the experience of Divine light.

8: Soham Mantra

God is manifest in the breath of man. When you breathe, where does the breath come from? It comes from within you. The breath itself is God. What is its form? It is present in man in the form of Soham, which reveals man's divine identity. 'So' means 'that', 'Ham' means 'I'. Therefore, 'Soham' means 'That I am'. 'That' refers to God. God is present in man in the form of love. Therefore, man should treasure love in his heart safely. Other thoughts come and go like passing clouds. Only love is permanent and eternal.

You should perform every task with love. Even if you come across your enemy, you should lovingly greet him, saying 'hello, hello'. Then he will also respond, saying 'hello, hello' to you. This is the reaction, reflection, resound of your feelings. Whatever good or bad you experience is the result of your own feelings. Everything comes from within you. Hence, you should always remain immersed in love. If you have love, you can achieve anything and perform any task. It is love that is responsible for the entire creation and its functioning in this world. There is no greater God than love. Love is God. Whatever you do without love is merely a futile exercise. Hence, treasure love in your heart. Everybody will be attracted towards this love. It will bestow everything on you. When you look at the world with your physical eyes, you see diversity in it. But, in fact, everything is love. Love is changeless. You should always remain filled with such love. If you follow this principle of love, it will give you the fruit of all the spiritual practices.

9: Silence promotes self control

Silence. This is the first step in spiritual practice; it makes the other steps easy. It promotes self-control; it lessens chances of anger, hate, malice, greed, pride. Besides, you can hear His footsteps only when silence reigns in the mind.

When you converse with others, you should do so with respect. You should not use harsh words. "If you cannot oblige, speak obligingly" is the golden rule you should follow. When you salute others, it goes to God. When you criticise or abuse another person, that also goes to God. You must discourage and control the emergence of bad qualities.

When you are in a bad or an angry mood, keep silent. Do not exchange words, which cause the anger to multiply. That is why we say, “Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti” at the end of the devotional singing session. Why three times and not four ? It is to cover the three entities: body, mind, and Atma. You should have shanti (peace) in all the three levels.

10: Repeat God's name in the silence of the heart

The magnet cannot draw to itself a bit of iron that is covered with rust and dust. You cannot yearn for God when your mind is laden with the rust of material desires and when the dust of sensual craving sits heavy on it. Clear the rust, know the glory of God, and repeat His name in the silence of the heart. Any one of the names that denote Him can be selected. Do not listen to people who canvass for one particular name and cavil at others.

Bhagavan says, you should chant the divine name wholeheartedly with full faith. While attending to your duties in your own house or in the outside world, you must constantly remind yourself that “whatever I do, think or speak, everything belongs to God.” Take for example, the process of cooking. You add different ingredients to the items being cooked, in definite proportions and try to make them tasty. But the real taste comes only when the job of cooking is done as an offering to God. The food becomes divine when it is offered to God. On the other hand, if the various items are cooked with the attitude, ‘I am doing this job as a routine; I am cooking these items for my family members to partake’, it does not reach God.

Hence, whatever work you undertake, do it as an offering to God chanting the name ‘Ram’, ‘Ram’, ‘Ram’. Even while walking, think that it is God who is making you walk since Divinity is present in a subtle form in every atom and cell in this Universe. Unable to recognize this as the truth, people think, ‘I came on foot, I walked so many miles’ etc. Such work comes under the physical realm, not spiritual. Hence, whatever you think, speak or do, consider it as God's command, God's work. With such an attitude it is enough if you chant the divine name ‘Rama’ just two times - morning and evening. Not only the name “Rama”, you can chant any name. Chant any divine name wholeheartedly at least once. That would be alright.

11: Meditate on Swami's teachings during silence

Promote love in your hearts, and share it with others. That is the best form of worship. Love is the only property of Sai. My life is love. That is what I offer to one and all. I go on giving, giving. But to what extent are you putting into practice Swami's teachings? Practise silence for at least ten minutes in a day. Meditate on Swami's teachings at that time. Realise that in this transient world the Eternal is immanent. Hold fast onto God. Experience the bliss of union with the Divine. Make love your life-breath. With love of God in their hearts the ancient sages could transform even the wild animals in the forests.

12: You can experience divine bliss only in absolute silence

When God is all-pervasive, where is the need to go in search of Him? You should make efforts to experience your innate Divinity by observing total silence and turning your vision inward. You can experience Divine bliss only in absolute silence. That is why it is said, “Silence is golden.”

Silence is the only language of the realised. Practise moderation in speech. That will help you in many ways. It will develop love, for most misunderstandings and factions arise out of carelessly spoken words. When the foot slips, the wound can be healed; but when the tongue slips, the wound it causes in the heart of another will fester for life. The tongue is liable for four big errors: uttering falsehood, scandalising, finding fault with others, and excessive articulation. These have to be avoided if there is to be peace for the individual as well as for society. The bond of brotherhood will be tightened if people speak less and speak sweetly. That is why silence was prescribed as a vow for spiritual aspirants by the scriptures. You are all spiritual aspirants at various stages of the road, and so this discipline is valuable for you also.

13: Two functions of the tongue

Control of the senses should be one of the primary aims of students. More than the sense organs, the sensory perceptions are powerful. They are: sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. Among the sense organs the most important one is the mouth (or tongue), with its power of speech. If one can conquer the tongue, he will be the master of all the other senses. The tongue has two functions: speaking and eating. Whoever is able to master these two faculties will be able to raise himself to the level of the Divine. When the tongue becomes silent, the mind begins to talk. To control the mind's talk, the buddhi (intellect or intelligence) has to be awakened. Then one should strive to turn the intellect or intelligence towards the Atma (the Divine). True spiritual striving consists in turning the tongue towards the mind, the mind towards the intellect, and the intellect towards the Atma. Although this royal road is available to man, he chooses to immerse himself in worldly pleasures and becomes submerged in sorrow.

14: Right speech

Baba says, If you want to know the way in which you have to observe truth in speech, read the Bhagavad Gita. It tells you that the best speech is speech that does not create pain or anger or grief to others. The scriptures also say, “Speak the truth and speak pleasantly. Do not speak the truth which is not pleasant. If speaking truth will cause grief or pain, keep silent.” The first step in spiritual discipline is the cleansing of speech. Talk sweetly without anger. Do not boast of your scholarship or attainments. Be humble, eager to serve; conserve your speech. Practise silence. That will save you from squabbles, idle thoughts, and factions.

15: The silent man has no enemies

Before a person talks he should put to himself three questions; Is it necessary? Is it true? Is it not harmful to anyone? Only then should one decide to talk. The tongue is the armour of the heart; it guards one's life. Loud talk, long talk, wild talk, talk full of anger and hate – all these affect the health of man. They breed anger and hate in others; they wound, they excite, they enrage, they estrange. Why is silence said to be golden? The silent man has no enemies, though he may not have friends. He has the leisure and the chance to dive within himself and examine his own faults and failings. He has no more inclination to seek them in others. If your foot slips, you suffer a fracture; if your tongue slips, you fracture someone's faith or joy. That fracture can never be set right; that wound will fester forever. Therefore use the tongue with great care. The softer you talk, the less you talk, the more sweetly you talk, the better for you and the world.

16: Know your true identity

Many people talk in several ways that the world is full of sorrows, miseries and difficulties. But, in fact, nothing of this sort exists. Their supposed existence is nothing but our own delusion. In reality, there is no existence of difficulties in this world, nor is there any unrest seen anywhere. Wherever we look, there is only peace, peace and peace. When there is peace in our heart, we will see peace everywhere. On the contrary, if we have no peace in our heart, then we will find restlessness everywhere. All the restlessness, sorrows and anxieties are our own reaction, reflection and resound. These are all of our own making; they don't have any real existence. In fact, reaction, reflection and resound are caused by many kinds of our own delusions.

Here let me narrate an anecdote of Bhagavan. One day a young man noticed an old woman searching for something under a street light. The young man asked her, “Grandmother! What do you want? What is it you are searching for? What have you lost?” The old woman replied, “Look here! I lost my needle in my hut. I have no lamp there. Since there is no light in my hut, I am searching for the needle here under the street light.” See! How funny it is! So also, is our search for happiness. Why? The reason is simple. We are not searching for it where we are supposed to. Our happiness lies in our hearts. But our search for it is always external or in the outside world. How do we get it? Is it proper to search for it in the outer world when it is within? How foolish we are!

17: The mind must desist from wandering

Speech is produced cheaply, but it has high value. It can elevate as well as demean man. Listening to a speech, a zero can rise into a hero or a hero can collapse into a zero. Speech can inspire or plant despair. It must be true and sweet, not false and pleasant. Man must endeavour to acquire speech untouched by subterfuge, limbs untouched by cruelty, hands free from violence, and thoughts free from vengefulness. Frenzy, fanaticism, and gusts of anger have to be controlled, for they lead to disasters whose range is beyond calculation. By constant practice, these can also resort to the vow of silence. The mind also must desist from wandering when the tongue is desisting from talking. Otherwise, the vow cannot be fruitful. Be conscious that every word we utter or hear will leave an impression on our consciousness and provoke reactions that may or may not be beneficial. This is the reason why the company of God and godly people is to be sought.

18: The best way to appease spiritual hunger

Each one eats to assuage his own hunger; so too, each one must discover the best way to appease his own spiritual hunger. Do not be led away by the scorn of others, or by the recommendations of others. Contact your own reality in the silence that you create by quieting the senses and controlling

the mind. There is a voice that you can hear in that silence. The true witness of your having listened to that voice is your behavior. The tree is held and fed by the roots that go into the silent earth; so also, if the roots go deep into the silence of your inner consciousness, your spiritual blossoming is assured.

Bhagavan says, to get rid of ego, there is only one path – it is to pursue the godly way of life. When you are puffed up with the sense of ego, sit silently in a corner and observe what your breathing is telling you.

19: The same Atma is present in all

A person remained silent though he was being criticised. When his friend wanted him to react, he replied, “The same Atma is present in me as well as in the person who is criticising. So, why should I be annoyed when he is criticising himself?” A deep inquiry into the truth will reveal that when you love or hate others, you love or hate your own self. In fact, there are no “others.” You consider yourself different from others because of body attachment. Once you give up body attachment, you will realise that there are no others and all are yours. That is the true vision of the Atma. The Atma does not have a specific form.

When you ask somebody, “What is your name?” he will tell the name given to him by his parents. Truly speaking, that is not his name. If you ask God the same question, He will say, “Aham Brahmasmi” (I am Brahman). All of us should give the same reply, “Aham Brahmasmi, Aham Brahmasmi; I am Brahman; I am Brahman” We have no other name except this. Names that we bear have been given to us by our parents; we are not born with these names. Your real name is Brahman. Those who are not able to recognise this truth can never experience true happiness in life.

20: Triple purity that pleases the Lord

There are three things that are immensely pleasing to the Lord: a tongue that never indulges in falsehood, a body that is not tainted by causing harm to others, and a mind that is free from attachment and hatred. These three constitute the triple purity. Refrain from uttering falsehood, inflicting pain on others, and entertaining ill will towards others. Practise silence as a means of preventing the tongue from straying away from truth. The ancient sages practised and preached silence for this purpose.

People lose a thing of great value if they fail to listen to their inner voice. They are afraid of being alone. They avoid silence as something detestable! But you can discover your own truth only when you are alone with yourself and there is silence all around you.

21: Light Meditation

To practice this meditation, Baba recommends that the aspirant set aside a few minutes every day, preferably in the morning before the events of the day distract the mind. A small lamp or candle can be used to help the meditator visualize the light of love and truth. This flame is pictured between the eyebrows as the light of wisdom; from there it is brought down to the heart and visualized as a lotus of love blooming petal by petal. As the light grows, it purifies all the senses and impulses, taking all into the light of divine love. Over time, this meditation purifies the individual's thoughts and actions, making him or her fit for realization of divinity.

22: How we recognize progress in our meditation?

A miner knows success when he strikes gold. A racer knows success when he crosses the finish line. A meditator knows success when he transforms his character. Meditation must enable us to practice truthfulness, love, inner peace, and care for all beings. If meditation cannot change our lives, it is a hollow practice.

Do you love more, do you talk less, do you serve others more earnestly? These are the signs of success in dhyana. Your progress must be authenticated by your character and behavior.