

Silence in spite of thoughts

An Article by Swami Dayananda Saraswati | Version 1.01

To create a condition of mind that enables you to see the truth of yourself, you must remove all of your false notions. With love, you have to criticize various opinions and prejudices. There is no other way to obtain clarity, which is the sweetest thing. Whatever denies you a clear vision of the truth has to be eliminated, along with limiting notions and prejudices about yourself. You condemn yourself, “I am useless, I am worthless”, and it is this self condemnation that stands in the way of knowing what you are.

When a guru comes and tells you that you are *sat cit ānanda*, that you are full and you are the center of creation, that there is nothing beyond you, it is a beautiful thing that you see. Not just beautiful, more than that. “Such a profound truth am I, I lack nothing. I am all that I seek.” That is a stunning discovery. Who would think that he/she could be all that? “How could I ever imagine that the thing I am seeking in life is myself? By the very fact that I am seeking it, I can’t imagine that it is myself.”

The truth is heard, but not assimilated. For those who seem to follow what the guru says, as long as the guru is talking, everything seems to be clear. You think, “That is true. That is true.” Then the guru goes, and that *ānanda* you felt and all that he said, all that also goes. When he comes, *ānanda* comes; when he goes, *ānanda* goes. Therefore, you begin to doubt what you understood. “Did the Swami hypnotize me? I think he made me believe that I am wonderful. If I saw that I am wonderful why don’t I feel that I’m wonderful now?” It is that old confusion of knowledge and experience.

If hypnotism could do it, I need not teach like this. I need only tell you from the first day onwards, “You are all happiness, you are all joy, you are all joy, you are all joy...” That is called hypnotism. It doesn’t work. The whole teaching is an unfolding. Just as the artist makes you see beauty in something you generally take as commonplace, so the teacher makes you see yourself. He doesn’t bring his own experience and tell you. He uses your experience as the basis for teaching and makes you see the truth of that experience. This brings about assimilation in terms of knowing the experience of yourself. So it is not hypnotism.

Then if it is knowledge, why does it seem to not stay and serve me? It doesn’t serve me because the mind is still the old mind with all its likes and dislikes which it picked up over many years and which do not just drop away overnight. Previously we were agitated. After listening to the teaching, we again suffer through spells of sadness, of frustration, of sorrow, of anger --- what we don’t want to happen keeps happening. So the mind keeps saying, “I want to see myself

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as a full being all the time!” Well, of course, I am always a full being, but I forget. On a day to day basis this knowledge doesn’t seem to serve me, and therefore it seems isolated from my life. What can I do about that?

The silent self

I must come to know that I am the truth of every thought. Whether it be an agitating thought or a blissful thought, I am the truth of the thought. A thought has no existence without me. It exists only as a reflection of my own self-effulgent being. It is something that shines after me, as the moon shines after the sun, and therefore a thought cannot disturb me. It depends upon me. If, on the other hand, I am the thought, then whatever is the condition of the mind is my own condition. If the mind is restless, I am restless.

The mind undergoes change. The mind is meant to undergo change. I should see myself in spite of changing thoughts as a person who is all silence, even as gold, in spite of being a chain, is all gold. It need not become a ring in order to take itself as gold. Whether it be a chain or a ring or a bangle, it is pure gold all the time. Once I see that the thought (or the chain) is mithya, apparent, then the apparent cannot cause a problem.

Therefore, I can and must see myself, not in the absence of thoughts, but in spite of thoughts. This is called meditation. What is that unchanging ‘I’ that is to be seen in spite of thoughts? That ‘I’ is silence. That ‘I’ is happiness. That ‘I’ is fullness. That ‘I’ is freedom. It lacks nothing. It is always free, the free, silent self.

Now, the silence that is the self is not something that is different from myself. Can I ever gain silence? No. Can I ever regain silence? No, because I am silence, I need not do anything to gain silence. Nor can I regain silence because it is not something that comes and goes. Agitation comes and goes. All those thoughts which seem to destroy silence – they come and go. But silence is something that always remains, before agitation, under agitation, and after agitation. When agitation goes I am silent. Because I am generally agitation, it seems as if silence comes and goes. In England, where it is cloudy all the time, it seems as if the sun comes and goes. In truth, the sun does not come and go. It is the clouds that come and go. The sun always remains. Similarly, here the clouds in my mind fall away and I see myself as silence. They come again and I seem to lose myself. That is all that happens. Silence is never away from me.

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In order to learn anything I must be silent, otherwise learning can't take place. Because I am silent now and then, I have gained some knowledge. But if I try to pick up something when I have a lot of thoughts in my mind, nothing will happen. Even a newspaper column won't make sense because my mind is occupied. When the mind is preoccupied I can learn nothing new.

Changing thoughts

I know that silence isn't something unknown to me. It only appears to come and go because thoughts appear to create agitation. I take thoughts as myself and become agitated due to mechanical thinking. The deep accumulation of likes and dislikes, of undigested and unassimilated ideas, cause so many conflicts and frustrations that the mind becomes mechanical. It reacts rather than acts. Once a thought comes, and that thought takes me to another thought, and that thought again takes me to another thought, I experience a spell of agitation.

In such mindlessly mechanical thinking I take the very thought as myself. I forget myself. Then when the thought goes away I suddenly come back to myself and pick up a moment of silence. Thus silence appears to appear to come and go. But if I analyze it, the problem is not one of discovering silence but one of destroying mechanical thinking.

A thought comes and goes. Before it came there was silence, and after it goes there is silence. Again, after another thought, there is silence. Between thoughts there is silence. Silence is not something I have to strive for. Thoughts come and go. Silence always is. And still I miss it. What does this mean? I miss it because I walk upon the thoughts. I am carried away with the thoughts.

I miss the silence when there is a buildup of thoughts, thereby creating a spell. I walk upon the thoughts. I don't get to the ground. My mind, by some association, jumps from one thought to another. The association can be a simple sound, even a rhyme. The meaning of a word can also bring any number of other words to mind. Just as the monkey leaps and catches the next branch, I also catch the first thought and leave the last one. This is why the mind is called a monkey. I must learn to break the spell of this mechanical travel upon thoughts and discover the silence between two thoughts. This should become a practice for me.

I should provide myself with a situation wherein I can develop the knack of being with myself in spite of thinking. This special situation is called meditation.

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What is meditation? Am I meditating when I remove all thoughts? Suppose I try to remove all thoughts. Then what happens when a thought comes? Silence is gone. I am going to be in for trouble, because the arrival of a thought becomes a problem. Can I have a mind that will never think? Would I ever ask God, “Oh, God, give me a mind which will never think!” Why should He give me a mind at all, then? The mind is meant to think. Thinking doesn’t create problems. It is a blessing to be given a mind. To make thought into a nightmare is the silliest thing a person can do.

If you think the absence of thought is meditation or seeing funny visions is meditation, I would say that is *madditation*. Seeing funny visions is not meditation, removing thoughts is not meditation. If I seek to remove all thoughts I only become frustrated and condemn myself as worthless because I can’t do it. In trying to be “spiritual”, I become so frustrated with myself that I become an impossible person to be with. I can’t stand anything going on, because it all creates thoughts in me.

Developing the knack

Any process of thinking is a chain of many and varied thoughts. In this chain there is always a probability of being carried away on the thoughts, a superficial, reacting, mechanical form of thinking. But now I am going to do something with my mind whereby I shall have many thoughts and, at the same time, I am going to discover the silence between the thoughts.

How do I do this? Instead of having many varied thoughts, I create thoughts that are many in number but are all identical. If the second thought is just like the first thought and the third is just like the second, no captivating thought chain is created. There is no association, no connection.

Only thought-period. Thought – period. Thought-period. After the first thought, what is there? Silence. After the second thought? Silence. Third thought? Silence. Fourth thought? Silence. What am I doing now? Learning. Learning what? The knack. Of what? Of being silent. Between what? Thoughts. It’s a knack, just like learning to ride a bicycle or swim. That single thought may be repeated as one word. What should that word be? Should it be meaningful or meaningless? If I take a meaningless word and start repeating it the mind tells me that I am doing a meaningless thing.

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So I should choose a meaningful word, something representing the Whole, the core of creation. Something that is not one of the things in the creation. And because it is a word that is very meaningful to me, the entire teaching can be seen in that one simple word. Any word which you recognize as the name of the Lord, a word which, as you repeat it, makes you appreciate yourself is fine. It should be a very meaningful word in which you are included.

The word can be one like Om, a word which includes everything, both in its meaning and in its sound. It has the sounds 'a', 'u', 'm'; 'a' stands for the waking, physical world; 'u' stands for the thought world; 'm' stands for the unmanifest. Therefore, the whole creation and the basis thereof are all brought into this one syllable, Om.

The word you chose could be another word. It could be Jesus. Or you can say, "*Om namaḥ śivaya.*" *Namaḥ* means "I salute." *Śiva* means "all-auspicious," that which is all *ānanda*. Thus, "Unto the Lord I offer my salutations." Such words form a prayer. If I require that, these words are very useful. So long as the word is meaningful, it can be anything. Om. Om. Om. Is there any connection between them? No, because each is complete. The thought is the same even though it is repeated a number of times. And the repetition must be there. Why? Why not have only a single Om? Because in order to discover silence between thoughts I must necessarily have many thoughts, but not various thoughts. To have various thoughts means that the thoughts form a chain, and I will not discover silence in a thought-chain. Therefore, I feed myself a single thought many times. I don't create a chain, but at the same time I see a number of thoughts. The first is not different from the second, and the second is not different from the third. Thus I provide myself with a situation wherein I discover the silence between thoughts. I can't miss it.

When I chant Om, what is next? Silence. Om. Silence. Om. Silence. And I do this all in order to see that I am silence in spite of having two successive thoughts. This new occupation, called meditation, helps me discover with ease that I am always the same. In spite of all actions performed, perceptions gathered, and thoughts entertained, I remain the same free being that is silent and does no action whatsoever.