

# **Burning the Curtains of Ignorance with Meditation, Mantra, and Pranayama**

Sri Karunamayi "Amma"

**A**mma's Most Beloved Children, Blessed Divine Souls,

I am very pleased to meet all of you this evening. Really, it feels like it is a festival day, like Christmas, Sivaratri, or Navaratri. Finally we meet, after a physical separation of one year, though it really is not so. Amma is always within you in the form of your love, your devotion and your peace.

Once upon a time, a devotee of Sri Krishna named Uddhava came from Mathura to Brindavana. He told all the gopikas that Krishna would be coming in a week to give darshan. The gopikas replied, "Krishna is always in our hearts. He never leaves us." That is the feeling I also have in my heart. Amma is always in you, in the form of peace, and in the form of your devotion.

My dear children, millions of years ago in the Vedic times in India, devotees asked the same questions of the spiritual masters, the rishis, namely: "Why this agony?" "Why this sadness in the world?" "Why do we come to this world?" "Why are we so deeply steeped in this selfishness?" All these questions were asked millions of years ago of the Vedic rishis. The only answer to all these questions is, in one word, selfishness. We have this anger, jealousy, restlessness and so many of the common human negative qualities solely because of our selfishness. If we are in our natural state, the state of eternal bliss, we are always in boundless happiness.

There are four stages of spiritual development. The first is the physical stage. We are always thinking about our physical life and the external forces in our life. In this stage we think we belong to a particular place, a particular religion, a particular country, and a particular family. We are very limited. This is the lowest level. The second stage is the mental state. Here, we give service. This level is not stable; sometimes it is good-up, sometimes it is bad-down. The spiritual state is the third stage. In this we begin to seek the truth and do sadhana. But in the state of pure Consciousness we feel that we belong to the entire world, and know no distinctions. We belong to all religions, not to a particular country, place or family. We belong to the oceans, the blooming flowers, the stars, the moon, the sun, all mankind, and even the insects-that is, to everything in this world. We feel that we are not bound to a particular body, mind and intellect, and are beyond all these things. So that is the real Consciousness, the fourth stage. When we are in this Consciousness, our soul experiences boundless happiness.

When we view our ancient rishis, it becomes apparent that they meditated for thousands of years without any food and even without any air. Without even a glass of water, they did severe penance. We are not doing this, but at least we have to spend some time in meditation. We have twenty-four hours in a day, and we must sacrifice at least one of these for spiritual activities. The rishis and mahatmas who have come down to this Earth have descended from the very highest state of consciousness. No one knows from which state they have come! Persons in the highest state of supreme samadhi do not like to come to this world at all, but because of the suffering of their children who are in this materialistic world, they have come down from the highest level to your level, teaching and explaining everything to you. They do not expect anything from you. What do you have to give them? You are empty-handed. They are in pure and complete Consciousness, full of divine light and illumination.

We are ordinary persons with a lot of limitations. And, as you know, the thinking of our minds is very, very low. Many times we are at the lowest level. This is mainly because there are a lot of impurities in our minds. An ordinary person is always going after mundane things in this world, things that are

useless, whereas the mahatmas want only God Consciousness. They are always in that state only and they don't come down at all. There is meaning in whatever they do, but in what we do there is no meaning at all. Whatever they speak is full of worthiness, but what we say is unworthy.

Spirituality means wisdom-pure, complete wisdom, the state in which we know that we are not bound to anything in this world. But generally we are just like fish in a pond. If we keep a fish in honey, what happens to it? That is an unnatural state for the fish. If we keep a fish in milk or yogurt, what happens? It dies there. Why? Because it is not natural for a fish to be in honey, milk or yogurt. In the same way, kindness, forgiveness, love, divinity and selfless service, all these are the true characteristics of our soul. We are not in that character because of the illusion in our mind. We think, "I am this body, I am this mind, I am this tamasic nature." So, we are always in these bonds because of ignorance and illusion.

To remove these we have to do chakra dhyana. When the sun's rays fall directly on a piece of cotton or paper, it doesn't burn. But when a lens is put between them, the rays of the sun converge at one single point. As the rays are concentrated at that point on the paper, it will immediately start burning. This is why we have to focus our minds on one single point in meditation, the point between the eyebrows called the ajna chakra. Because of our karmas or samskaras, the chakras have been blocked and there is no illumination at all. Actually, these chakras are self-luminous, but because of our karmas, they have been covered. This covering can be washed away only by meditation and mantra japa.

When we practice meditation, gradually the curtains of ignorance are removed from our eyes, our hearts, our entire lives, and burned by the mantra. The Saraswati Mantra is complete Knowledge. There are four seed letters in the Saraswati Mantra. One is the Om mantra. Om is the ocean for all mantras. All the mantras are very small drops in the ocean of the Om mantra. "Mantranam pranavah setuh." For all the billions of mantras, pranava mantra, or the Om mantra, is the ocean. Thus, when we start meditation, we must first chant the Omkara nine times in a most melodious and soft voice, like this: Oooooooooom-not too long and not too short. With a sweet rhythm we start this Om mantra from our root chakra to the sahasrara. These seven flowers, the seven chakras in our body-the muladhara, svadhishtana, manipura, anahata, vishuddha, ajna and sahasrara chakras-all these chakras are stimulated by just one mantra, the Omkara, chanted with rhythm and full concentration. Then, automatically we will achieve that inwardness in our hearts.

Without concentration one may sit for a long time in a closed room-for five or even six hours-but what is the use? On the other hand, if we have concentration for five minutes-or even one second-it is enough. In true devotion toward God we merge with that Eternal Light. If this lasts for even one second, it is enough. And so, my dear, sweet children, practice Omkara like this, with inner devotion and a sweet, soft and melodious voice. When we recite Omkara nine times, we should also always be facing toward the east. This is very, very important. The Earth's magnetic waves travel from east to west, and from north to south. If we face the eastern direction, we will be in tune with this flow, and this will be an aid to concentration, enabling us to sit in meditation for a long time.

Pranayama is the greatest yoga. Especially if you don't have good concentration in meditation, you should try this method of breath control. Pranayama controls the mind. It balances the five elements in our body, which contains the five vital airs-prana, vyana, apana, udana, and samana. These five vital airs become amrit in the sushumna nadi. By practicing pranayama five or six times before meditation, gradually the root chakra opens and kundalini, the serpent power of awareness, rises. There are at least fourteen varieties of pranayama, but we should practice only sukha, the easiest, most simple one. Going from the left to the right nostril, we should take a deep breath through the left nostril only, close both nostrils briefly and then exhale through the right; next we should inhale through the right nostril, close

both, and exhale through the left. This is one round of pranayama, and should be practiced five to six times. This will calm the mind.

Gradually, we will gain awareness and develop the power to watch ourselves internally. When we listen to the inner voice, we will understand why, immersed in the external world, with so much body and mind consciousness, we experience all this agony, misery and sorrow. On the other hand, if we go inward, inward, inside the heart cave, gradually we will enjoy the Omkara. Each and every particle of our body, each and every body cell, will sing the Omkara. Now, we are just singing Omkara externally. After the awareness of kundalini, or serpent power, however, each and every cell of our body will vibrate with the sound of "Om." When we are asleep, we will hear "Om." When we walk, eat, or do anything else, we will be immersed in "Om," enjoying that Omkara inside and everywhere.

So by combining pranayama with the sound of the Om mantra, the seventy-two thousand nadis of our whole subtle nervous system will vibrate in a positive way. Rivers always flow from a higher to a lower altitude; they never go the other way. Planets rotate in rhythm. Cars follow a system on the roads. The whole of nature has a system. But our hearts and ways of thinking are not always systematic because of our previous good and bad deeds. If we always have a positive way of thinking, we will easily merge with the Eternal. Gradually practicing the Saraswati seed mantra, Om, will cause our hearts to think more positively.

The second seed mantra, Aim, is very, very powerful and sweet. It helps us to develop the knowledge of what is good and bad, to recognize and recollect our previous births and samskaras, and follow the path of good. The Saraswati Mantra always shows us the right way, the way of positive thinking. Evil qualities such as anger and jealousy will gradually be given up and burned by the use of this mantra, Aim. And the seed mantra, Srim, represents wealth in all aspects, such as good health, good words and good feelings in all our activities throughout life. Hrim is the seed mantra for energy, the very source of energy.

All these mantras are part of a special triangle within the Sri Chakra design. In the Sri Chakra, one line is Aim, sound. The second line is Srim, light. The combination of sound and light produces energy, the third line, Hrim. In the middle of this triangle, at the very center of the Sri Chakra, is the Om mantra. It is the main seed mantra of all these mantras. So Om is the ocean. When this Om expands and expands, it covers millions and billions of galaxies. If we have a positive lifestyle and way of thinking, good habits, regular practice of meditation, good food habits and silence, then our life will become spiritual, disciplined and good. Eating at any time, talking uselessly, always thinking with a negative attitude, all these are against our true nature. When we go against nature, against the current, life is not easy.

So children, practice this Saraswati Mantra. Saraswati Herself is Knowledge. Although Saraswati Devi has graced us with the power of speech, we do not say the right words. A dumb person is far better than we are. We are always telling lies. We always have jealousy. Our behavior is not correct at all. Even though we have the blessings of Saraswati Devi, we are not utilizing our words in the right way. God has given us the mind to think about Him, to contemplate on Him, but what are we doing with our minds? Always thinking of useless things.

Devi has been praised like this in one song: She is the One who dwells in Manidwipa, on the Sri Giri (Golden Mountain). She is "Vanchithartha prayayini." This means that Divine Mother immediately gives us whatever we ask for-much more than we ask for! For example, I may have a very big chocolate box containing many chocolates. If a small child comes and asks for some, and I encourage him to do so, how many can he take? Only enough to fill his palm. He can take only a limited number, not all the chocolates. However, I can give him many more candies than he has taken, for he is a small child and

his palm is small. So whatever you ask for will always be limited, because you don't know how to ask, nor what to ask for. But if Divine Mother starts giving, She can give much more. And even if you don't expect anything, Divine Mother will give generously. She will elevate our knowledge, gradually merging our individual personality with the universal personality. That is the true essence of our life.

You must give your service to mankind. The world gives us so many things. It comforts us and loves us in so many ways. We never repay the love that Nature gives us. It is our responsibility to give back at least a very tiny, small particle of selfless love to nature and mankind. It is our responsibility. We are always in illusion, never recognizing the way of knowledge, the way of thinking positively. By practicing the Saraswati Mantra, gradually all our negative thoughts and deeds from previous births will be burned and we will merge with the Eternal.

So, wisdom is our Self. Watch the Self, watch the Self. Our physical self is not our inner Self. To attain the Self is the real goal of life-not just eating and talking. There is no meaning at all in that life. We have come to the world so many times. We come and go and come and go, repeating the same eating and talking and way of life. There is no meaning at all in this kind of life. When we have true and real devotion in our heart, that devotion takes us to the higher levels of spirituality. We merge with the Eternal. You are not this body, you are not this mind, you really have no bond to this world. You are wisdom, you are truth, you are time. The past is yours, the future is yours. Everything is yours. All the planets are yours. They belong to your soul itself. We are everywhere, not only in this body. Every person belongs to us. That is the ultimate in spirituality.

My dear, most beloved children, you are already on this path. All obstacles are just like clouds in the sky. They come and go. You need not bother about them. The sky is always there, clouds come and go. So be a spectator in this world. Only meditation will give you this knowledge. It controls the emotions, it controls the negative elements in the body, it controls the negative way of thinking, and gives the strength of self-confidence and the power of self-control. If you want to achieve that state, you must silence the mind, and this can be done only through meditation. As our actions continue one by one, they become karmas, and these become our samskaras.

So, my dear children, from now on, don't have bondage. There are too many bondages! Don't be so attached! Whatever obstacle or problem comes to you, just face it! Ask God and He will help you. And as long as you keep doing your prayers and meditation, no matter what problem arises, it will not shake you at all.

Many people have the habit of putting pressure on others. If they try to force you, you don't have to give in to them. The energy of Divine Mother's trishula must be always with you, and if you have this trident protecting you always, whatever force may come will not affect you at all. In asking the question, "Who is the real surrendered soul, the real surrendered disciple?" the answer is this: If a disciple has even one desire, it is not real surrender! Whatever the guru says, you have to do-it is not the guru who has to do whatever you say! That is not true surrender at all. For example, Hanuman did whatever Sri Rama said, not the other way around.

Devotion is the very sweetest thing in this whole world. It is so full of joy and happiness. Try to spend most of your time in devotional activities. The world is the way it is because it is full of jealousy and other negative feelings. Thus, we are not able to live in this world peacefully. Even if a small thought arises in your mind, immediately it becomes an action. These actions, the work you do, must be controlled. So the main problem is in the mind. Your mind must be silent, and in an elevated state. Real devotion in our heart will gradually elevate us higher and higher beyond the three stages-from the physical to the mental, then to the spiritual, and finally to the level of the Eternal. That is our real state.

We are not this body. We have no name at all. We think we belong to this country. I think of this entire world as a small home. America is one room, Japan is one room, India is one room. We are just in a small home. There is a very affectionate brotherhood among us, because we are all in the same home. Why are there these differences between us? Why this agony? Because of our selfishness. So, my dear children, go beyond everything in this world. Merge with the Eternal through meditation. In that pure Consciousness we are in boundless happiness. Yes, our real Consciousness is boundless happiness. Also, give your service to the world. Physically, be in this world-that is not a problem. But selfless service towards all beings is the greatest yoga to merge with that Eternal. So merge with that Eternal, that is the ultimate stage.

My dear children, we are eternal. Amma wants all her children to be in that pure state of Consciousness. That is Amma's wish for her children. To achieve this, practice meditation daily early in the morning before sunrise for at least one hour. And start meditation with the repetition of the Omkara nine times. The vibration of the Om mantra purifies our entire life. After Omkara, practice pranayama. Pranayama controls the mind. It gives you immense concentration in meditation. After that, repeat the Saraswati Mantra five times and sit silently for five, six or seven minutes. If your mind wanders here and there, again take the mantra inside and recite it mentally five times. When we recite the mantra mentally, our mind is still working. When we sit silently in meditation, that is true meditation. In prayer, you are talking to God. In meditation, God is talking to you. So choose what is best.

Hari Om Tat Sat