

# Listen to Sounds Beyond Silence

By CHAITANYA CHARAN DAS

A T-shirt was embossed with the following statement: "Most people speak because they find speech more tolerable than silence". A blanket generalisation, doubtless, but maybe there's a grain of truth in it. For the stressed and distressed, though they are apparently silent, they could be screaming inside. If so, speaking does offer easy distraction from turmoil within.

The Bhagavad Gita says (17.16) that mauna is a form of austerity — that is, mauna or silence not only in speech but in mind as well. Mauna is not merely the inability to speak or the reluctance to speak; it is calmness of mind that enables you to hear the guiding voice of God within.

Certainly, both speech and silence have their utility for speech is a powerful and essential means for communication. Social reformers and others have galvanised people into action with the power of speech. On the other hand, seekers have introspected in silence in order to get closer to enlightenment. Could we then conclude that speech is a vehicle for social transformation and silence, for individual transformation?

There's another, intriguing but higher dimension, of sound beyond silence. Let's visualise our quest for happiness as movement on the y-axis of a mathematical model of life. We are all eternal spiritual beings, but because of spiritual amnesia, we are misidentifying ourselves with our temporary physical body. Physical activity — beginning with speech — makes us forget our natural spiritual joyfulness, and plunges us in anxiety and misery, till it falls flat on the negative y-axis. Material inactivity — beginning with physical silence — checks our preoccupation with the temporal and offers relief, but it alone does not revive spiritual memory. So it falls

on the origin — the zero point — on the y-axis. But spiritual activity — beginning with spiritual sound — cures us of amnesia by linking our consciousness with God, enlightening and enlivening us with divine wisdom and bliss. Hence it falls on the positive y-axis.

A maths novice might think that the positive and negative axes are identical. Similarly, a spiritual novice might assume spiritual and physical sounds to be identical. But the difference can be understood if only we try. A spiritually immature person unaware of spiritual values sees no difference between ordinary physical sound and extraordinary spiritual sound.

Physical sound agitates our mind, spiritual sound pacifies it. The former aggravates and perpetuates amnesia; spiritual sound alleviates and eradicates it. Physical sound entangles us, spiritual sound liberates us.



## THE SPEAKING TREE

What makes a sound spiritual? It is its connection with the supreme being, who resides on the positive infinity of the y-axis. St John states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". In Vedic tradition, hymns, verses, songs, mantras, bhajans and kirtans take seekers to higher realms of enlightenment and fulfilment. The greater the connection of sound with God, the greater its spiritual potency. Therefore, the most powerful spiritual sound is the Holy Name of God. Through group meditation on the sound of the holy Name or sankirtan, seekers can relish divine bliss and also share it with others. Thus spiritual sound offers us a unique vehicle for simultaneous individual and social transformation.

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