

Observing Mouna



The word mouna, or silence, is derived from the Sanskrit root “mun” which means to measure. It is said that silence is god, power, the living force, the only reality, the soul, peace, strength, goal, aim and purpose of our existence.

The system of mouna is not only to stop talking but to have better control over the expressions of the senses. The purpose of mouna is to measure and observe the input and output of the senses as a way to obtain inner silence. There are different types of silence. Some maintain silence but speak when needed. At this time the speech is controlled. Some don't speak but use paper to write and also use gestures to communicate. Some don't write or even have eye contact, they completely avoid communication between others. Through the practice of mouna, in whatever form, we ideally want to achieve mouna of the mind. Prana is the vital energy force which sustains life. It is used with thinking, speaking and acting. In yoga we try to control the prana, reduce the wastage of prana and try to channelize it for more spiritual purposes. It is said that if you waste your prana and use it unnecessarily you will finish your life more quickly. Therefore the prana needs to be preserved. By gaining control over the speech we can control the output of prana and achieve balance and inner silence.

Speaking is one of the major expressions of the human personality and it is part of human nature. If we cut off this sensory experience then the mind has to find other ways to express its energy. When you are interacting with people it is difficult to study yourself as you are being extrovert and focusing on them. If you are alone for an hour or more, even half an hour for the very busy person, you can gradually begin to observe and understand the functioning and patterns of the mind, which leads to self analysis and contemplation. You become more introverted and aware of your thoughts, desires, emotions, and so on. It is said that through the practice of silence one can develop the attitude of a seer, or one who observes everything.

Through silence we can get more physical and mental work done. The brain and nerves are soothed and meditation becomes easier. Silence develops will power, strengthens resolves, gives peace of mind, makes it easier to speak the truth and gives control over the speech. It helps to control anger, irritability and the emotions. It is also useful for physical and mental healing. It brings serenity, calmness and leads to inner spiritual strength.

Mouna - Yoga of Silence, Language of Gods

It is recommended that we should spend one week a year in complete solitude, staying in one place, not interacting with anybody and living a simple life. Many people who live in monasteries lead this kind of life, though the common person can also try and practice this yearly.

But practicing silence doesn't mean we should do it only once a year. It should be part of our daily life - silence, and restrain on the speech. You will notice that even just with restraining the speech there are many benefits. Silence is best practiced at certain times of the day, an hour or more is ideal. If practiced at a certain time it will prevent others, such as family members and friends, interacting with you at those times. It will give regularity and increase your willpower and inner strength. When maintaining silence it is best to either do your work or ideally, asana, pranayama, meditation, mantras, reading of spiritual books etc. The best times to practice mouna are in the early hours of the morning and at night time, and these are also the best times for yogic practices.

To start there will be difficulty, don't be hard on yourself, don't keep thinking to yourself, "I won't talk," as it will cause inner distress. Many things will come up to try and break the silence, but slowly the desire will go and your energies will become focused. Slowly increase the time spent in mouna. If you force yourself not to speak, especially for a long time, it can lead to outbursts in other ways, which wastes more energy than when you were talking. It will lead to restlessness and distress. Mouna should come naturally and never be forced.

In daily life bring discipline to your speech. Avoid long talks and unnecessary talk. If you talk a lot and then practice silence thinking that you will balance it, the benefits will not be there. There should be continual discipline of the speech, every word and the use of your words should be observed carefully. It must become part of the daily life.

By Jigyasu Bhakti Ratna (Kate Woodworth)