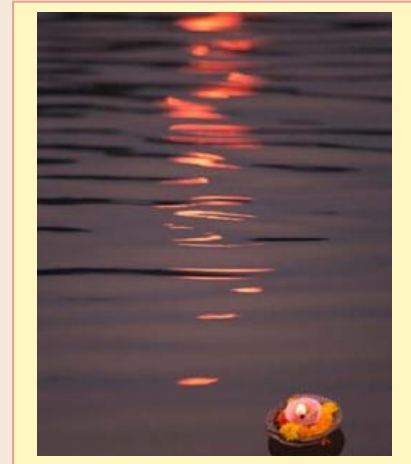


My experience of keeping Silence (Mowna)

By Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj, April 2010

**My experience of keeping Silence(Mowna) for a year
From July 2003 to June 2004
At Sri Ramanashram, Tamilnadu, India**



In English language, silence is interpreted superficially as remaining without any talk or noise. In most of religions/cults (Sufi, Tao, Buddhism) etc. silence is the stage where no thoughts arise i.e. the 'no mind stage' which leads to a beautiful void. Many mystics have held that silence is the ultimate reality or Supreme Truth. Many, therefore, consider that simple silence of the mouth is not much valuable unless accompanied by silence of the mind. I found in actual practice that huge benefits especially towards controlling of the mind are reaped by simple MOWNA itself.

1. Curbing of ego

Often when somebody talks to somebody else about some interesting or elevating experiences or anecdotes, we often immediately like to recount some parallel experiences of our own selves. Similarly when some stranger of high status has been introduced to us and he asks us some particulars about ourselves, we immediately narrate all our bio-data and attainments in order to impress others. In all these occasions, a strong silence puts a bar on such satisfactions derived by flaunting our ego. After several such occasions, even for a man with less spiritual characteristics, the ego learns its lessons in remaining humble. After all, one can be weaned away from all tendencies harmful or obstructive to the spiritual growth by repeated practice and effort to curb them.

2. Useless talk is avoided

On social occasions and also when in an intimate companies of friends, even swamijis or monks tend to descend to petty gossips about other swamijis, friends, ashrams or even unrelated persons or talking on politics etc. My silence automatically makes the other visitors or friends feel uncomfortable and they do the minimum necessary talks and walk

away. Thus, useless talks, gossips and collection/dissemination of useless information is avoided.

3. Restricts other's talks also

Often I have seen many people trying to talk to me. If they have questions about God or Self they are free to talk to me though I am on mowna. Thus so long as they remain with me, the talks of other people are also restricted to essentiality, as I refuse to answer even in writing answers to silly questions.

4. Develop equanimity & restrain anger

In mowna, you can not argue or throw abuses or use sarcasm with others. Incidentally, I have heard of a story-Two friends, both dumb from birth were standing on one side of the road at a distance from each other. One of them was making violent and angry gestures towards number 2 while the latter was looking elsewhere and laughing uproariously. When the latter was asked the reason for his merriment, he said "My friend number 1 is highly annoyed with me. He wants to abuse me and pour out his anger through special gestures which dumb men develop. I am purposely turning my face away from him so that I may not know what abuses he is throwing at me. This has infuriated him much more and I am laughing at this situation." Yes, if you are in mowna (silence), you cannot offend anybody or pick up quarrels with others. You cannot create reactions in other persons whom you meet, through open abuses or caustic criticism.

5. No reactions

Whenever a happening occurs there could be visible reactions, partly visible reactions and internal or mental reactions not visible outside. Supposing I am sitting outside my room with my legs outstretched and some person passing by that way crushes the toe of my foot with his booted leg. Or suppose while taking my food my neighbour spits out something out of his mouth and parts of it spill on the food I am eating. As I am in mowna I cannot react by giving expressions to my anger. Perhaps, with a long beard covering my face, even my facial expression of resentment, if any, may not be visible. Similarly, if some stranger congratulates me on the excellency of a book authored by me, I would normally like to draw him out further with questions like "In what way was it excellent.", " How do you say so, I do not see anything so praiseworthy" etc etc so that I could hear more of his praises, which were sweet to my ears. Now, in mowna, I cannot react except to smile with signs of pleasure.

6. Non-Interference

One day when I was going into the main shrine in a temple, a foreigner was being advised not to wear the shoes while going into the temple. Promptly the foreigner went outside, removed the shoes, put them in his zipped bag and walked into the temple. Normally I might have been tempted to interfere and instruct the foreigner not to do it.

As I was on silence, I coolly walked off. Thus, on many occasions my silence prevented me from interfering in other people's affairs.

7. An open zoo, a training ground

I have had experiences of retreating to mowna mandirs in Gujarat for 2-5 months at a time, where I was locked for the entire period in a room without windows, peep holes or crevices. I could neither talk nor see the outside world- the sky, the sun etc even. Meals were given through a locked opening in the wall. Here with all the people around interacting with us, both known and unknown and myself 'dumb' it looks like being in an open zoo with all the inmates of the zoo wandering freely and myself in a cage with doors which are bolted. I was vulnerable to any happenings or events of other people but I had no recourse to react or defend myself. Here, I have to be ever vigilant that I don't get provoked to open my mouth even unconsciously or react openly. Thus, I remain in a state of full consciousness at all times. Every time a provocation comes, by continuously restraining myself from reacting, this practice will result in doing away with all reactions once for all. A reaction is a mental process. We think and thus speak and/or act. When the mind sees that its thoughts (of anger, violence etc in retribution) are never translated into words or action it feels so frustrated that a time may come that all thoughts cease. Even if one were to say "You refrain from external reaction but your mental reaction of entertaining anger, resentment, bearing a grudge etc will remain." When once we refrain from reaction externally, in a little while, ourselves begin to contemplate on the situation and what all asadhakhas learnt from the scriptures and saints come to the fore. We realized how foolish and unspiritual like it would have been to have reacted. Thus, rationalizing on every occasion, even the mental reactions will dwindle and ultimately die away.

8. Patience

One day a visitor while going out of my room bolted the door from outside and went away for going round the hill at 4am. Because I could not shout (because of mowna) and some knocking I made on the door was not loud enough to be heard by my neighbors or the passersby I was sitting happily in meditation inside my room for nearly one and half hours. Such occasions result in exercising patience.

While going round the Samadhi (tomb of a saint) I have seen some persons of royal mien in front of me with a four feet long walking stick hugged horizontally under the arm pit, swinging the other arm freely and walking slowly in a zig zag motion from left to right and right to left. It used to be exasperating because I could not overtake him by left or right and the stick in his arm pit began to hit me while he went swinging from left to right. Being in silence I began to accept all such happenings without a single ripple of annoyance crossing my mind. This choiceless acceptance of all happenings and events without like or dislike is a high state in spirituality.

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