

The Soundless Sound

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

The Soundless Sound is a Theosophical designation for spiritual resonance apprehended through inward concentration, and for the unmanifest ground of the sounds and expressions of life. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky identifies it with the voice of *Nada* in *The Voice of the Silence*. Professor Raghavan Iyer relates it to *AUM*, the Great Breath and the Sacred Word. The phrase invites a change in how we understand listening: attention is drawn towards the source of meaning, and towards the quality of consciousness through which meaning becomes available.

Blavatsky begins by linking the comprehension of *Nada* with *Dharana*. Her accompanying note defines *Dharana* as intense concentration upon an interior object, with abstraction from the external world of the senses. The emphasis falls upon a disciplined power of attention. The Soundless Sound is not presented as a faint noise waiting to be detected by a more sensitive physical ear. Its meaning belongs to spiritual perception, where the relation between the perceiver and the objects of perception must itself be reconsidered.

Her image of the potter helps explain the relation between inward understanding and outward form. Before clay is shaped, the form exists in the potter's mind; similarly, the soul is asked to become united with the Silent Speaker. The image suggests an understanding that precedes and informs expression. Its human application can be quiet and exact. Before beginning a task, we may recollect its purpose and the people it serves. Action then has an inward reference against which haste, distraction and the wish for recognition can be examined.

The familiar experience of hearing can nevertheless offer an analogy. We may hear every word someone speaks while scarcely receiving what they mean, because another conversation continues inside us. Memory supplies a judgement, impatience prepares a reply, and attention becomes divided. Recognizing this movement does not confer the attainment described by Blavatsky. It does reveal a practical place where listening can deepen. We can allow a sentence to reach us before deciding what to do with it. Such receptivity gives understanding a little more room.

The cosmological setting is wider than this human example. In "Spectator and Participant," Professor Iyer speaks of the Soundless Sound of *Nada Brahman* in its unmanifest essence, and of its multiple differentiations as the Army of the Voice. In "Kalki Maitreya," he places pristine creativity within Divine Darkness and Supreme Silence, *maunam*. *Vach*, the Sacred Word or *Verbum*, is the enduring vibration in *Akasha* behind the emergence of worlds and beings. The

language concerns the passage from undifferentiated spiritual reality towards its manifold expression.

The word sound therefore carries a metaphysical meaning. It gathers motion, intelligence and formative expression into one field of contemplation. Its priority to audible sound is a priority of principle, rather than the claim that a particular noise occurred before other noises. A spoken word offers a modest comparison: an intention becomes communicable through a form, yet its meaning exceeds the vibrations carrying it. The cosmic teaching extends this relation beyond the scale of human speech. The analogy helps thought begin, while leaving the deeper reality open to inquiry.

Professor Iyer also protects the symbol from becoming a final object of thought. In “Atma Vidya,” he likens the Soundless Sound to a serene ripple upon the boundless ocean of space, reverberating to the silent breathing of That which exceeds the categories of space, time, causality and motion. The image invites contemplation of a living relation while pointing beyond every picture we make of it. A ripple gives the mind something to approach; the boundless ocean reminds it that the approach has not exhausted the subject.

AUM provides another bridge. In “The Spectrum of Consciousness,” Professor Iyer relates it to the origin, maintenance and dissolution of the cosmos, and to the beginning, continuance and ending of human life. *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* express these functions of creation, preservation and regeneration. He makes the possibility of reflection universal, explicitly including those who cannot pronounce the syllable aloud. The invitation begins with understanding. We may contemplate the whole movement of a life, allowing its phases to belong together instead of granting reality only to the phase we presently prefer.

The same essay describes an inward and sacrificial invocation of the Soundless Sound that awakens noetic intelligence and the higher centres of the human constitution. This belongs to Professor Iyer’s account of spiritual transformation, with its demands upon motive and discernment. An unusual sensation or an absorbing musical experience would not, by itself, establish such a transformation. The teaching directs attention towards the enduring quality of the perceiver. For the student, *Manas* can begin to become more responsive to *Buddhi* as thinking grows less possessive and concern becomes more inclusive.

The relation to compassion is especially clear in “The Pledge of Kwan-Yin.” Professor Iyer describes a latent *Kwan-Yin* in every human being, expressed at the ordinary level as conscience and, at the highest, as *Nada*, the Soundless Sound comprehended in initiation. He associates this with *anahata*, the deathless centre of the human body transformed into a divine temple. These are different depths of a spiritual possibility. The passage gives conscience a place within the larger teaching without making every personal conviction an infallible inner voice.

Conscience becomes more trustworthy as we are willing to examine what we want it to say. We can ask whether a judgement protects our convenience or answers a real need. We can notice when silence shelters resentment and when it makes room for a fuller understanding. Sometimes the generous act is to speak plainly; sometimes it is to stop pressing a point. In either case, listening serves another person's dignity. The inward discipline finds an outward measure in the patience, honesty and care that enter an encounter.

"Jnana Yajna" carries this responsibility into the consequences of speech. Professor Iyer discusses wasted words, harsh sounds and the karma they generate, while affirming the possibility of deep regeneration through meditation upon the Soundless Sound. His account also insists that consequences must be answered. For ordinary practice, the connection invites something more useful than regret alone. We can acknowledge a harmful remark, correct a misunderstanding, or make a promise more carefully. Inward recollection becomes fruitful when it helps us return to an unfinished responsibility with greater clarity.

The relationship with the Great Breath gives this work a larger setting. In "Space and Self-Consciousness," Professor Iyer joins the still reverberation of the night ocean with the ceaseless pulsation underlying life and compassion. Every being is likened to a drop within a shoreless sea of universal existence. The image widens belonging without removing particular duties. The person before us has a distinct history and a particular need; shared life asks that we attend to these with greater interest. Universal concern becomes tangible through the care given to a single meeting.

Blavatsky's own image of listening brings the teaching home: the soul is to hear every cry of pain as the lotus opens its heart to the morning sun. The silence sought is therefore inseparable from responsiveness. A day may remain full of voices, tasks and interruptions, while our manner of receiving it becomes less hurried. We may find a word that clarifies, a quiet that welcomes, or an act that relieves another's burden. The Soundless Sound remains a profound subject of contemplation, and its study can begin to educate the listening through which we take part in one another's lives.

Glossary

Akasha — Spiritual substance or space; in the cited teaching, the field of enduring sacred vibration behind differentiated manifestation.

Anahata — Literally unstruck; the deathless centre associated in Professor Iyer's passage with the human body transformed into a divine temple.

Army of the Voice — The differentiated hosts of intelligent powers in Nature, associated with the Sacred Word and the unfolding of cosmic order.

AUM or OM — The sacred sound-symbol whose highest meaning Professor Iyer identifies with the Soundless Sound; associated with cosmic origin, continuance and dissolution.

Brahma — The creative aspect of the divine triad; written *Brahmā* in the quotation and distinguished from *Brahman*, the supreme spiritual reality.

Buddhi — Spiritual discernment or intuition, through which thought may become responsive to universal life and concern.

Chitkala — In Professor Iyer's passage, the spiritual Voice as expressed in the developed disciple.

Dharana — Intense concentration upon an interior object, accompanied by abstraction from the external world of the senses.

Divine Darkness — A designation for the unmanifest spiritual ground, beyond the limited light of differentiated knowledge.

Great Breath — The symbol of eternal motion and of the rhythmic emergence and withdrawal of manifested worlds.

Jnana Yajna — Wisdom-sacrifice; the offering and application of spiritual understanding in a life of detachment and service.

Karma — The law of action and consequence, including the effects of thought, speech and conduct.

Kwan-Yin — The compassionate spiritual presence associated with the Voice; Professor Iyer relates its latent human expression to conscience.

Manas — The thinking principle, capable of personal fixation and of becoming responsive to spiritual discernment.

Maunam — Silence; in the cited cosmological passage, Supreme Silence as the eternal source of light and sound.

Monad — A spiritual unit or centre of life, understood in relation to the universal ground rather than as an independently existing fragment.

Nada — Spiritual sound or resonance; identified by Blavatsky with the Soundless Sound and the Voice of the Silence.

Nada Brahman — The divine reality contemplated as spiritual sound; in Professor Iyer's discussion, the Soundless Sound in its unmanifest essence.

Noetic intelligence — The intelligence of the higher or spiritual mind, distinguished from a passing collection of personal thoughts and impressions.

Oeahoo — A sacred designation associated with the root of cosmic manifestation and, in the quoted passage, the affirmation of the Army of the Voice.

Shiva — The aspect of the divine triad associated here with dissolution and regeneration.

Vach — The Sacred Word or divine speech; the enduring vibration in *Akasha* behind the manifold expressions of life.

Verbum — Latin for Word; used in the cited passage for divine or sacred speech.

Vestures — The bodies or vehicles through which consciousness functions on different planes of existence.

Vishnu — The preserving aspect of the divine triad, associated with the continuance and sustenance of manifested life.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, p. 1.

“He who would hear the voice of *Nada*, ‘the Soundless Sound,’ and comprehend it, he has to learn the nature of *Dharana*.”

Meditation thought: Begin with the quality of attention. Let one meaningful thought receive steady consideration before following the next impression that asks to replace it.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, p. 2.

“Before the soul can see, the Harmony within must be attained, and fleshly eyes be rendered blind to all illusion. Before the Soul can hear, the image (man) has to become as deaf to roarings as to whispers, to cries of bellowing elephants as to the silvery buzzing of the golden fire-fly. Before the soul can comprehend and may remember, she must unto the Silent Speaker be united just as the form to which the clay is modelled, is first united with the potter’s mind.”

Meditation thought: Consider the harmony that makes inward listening possible. In a conversation today, notice what changes when a prepared reply is set aside long enough to receive another person’s meaning.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Spectator and Participant”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 317.

“To reaffirm the One in the many and to benefit, as a participant, from the standpoint of the spectator, one may, therefore, meditate upon the Soundless Sound of *Nada Brahman* in its unmanifest essence and in its multiple differentiations as the Army of the Voice. One may meditate upon the OM as the ceaseless eternal sound and also as the great affirmation of the Army of the Voice symbolized by *Oeaohoo*.”

Meditation thought: Hold unity and differentiation together in thought. Let the recognition of shared life increase attention to the particular being or task before you.

4. R.N. Iyer — “Kalki Maitreya”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 428.

“This is the Divine Darkness, the Supreme Silence or *maunam* which is the eternal source of both light and sound. The archetypal mode of pristine creativity at the basis of the cosmos and Man lies hidden in the mystery of the Soundless Sound, the Eternal AUM throughout the ages. The Sacred Word, *Vach*, the *Verbum*, is the original and enduring vibration in *Akasha* behind the myriad reverberations that bring into being myriad worlds and vast hosts of sentient creatures belonging to all the seven kingdoms of Nature. The living presence of the sound in the silence is the invisible and inaudible core of every monad, divine and human, solar and lunar.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate silence as a depth of possibility. Allow the image of an enduring Word to encourage reverence for what may be expressed through an ordinary human action.

5. R.N. Iyer — “Atma Vidya”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 64.

“The Soundless Sound is rather like a serene ripple upon the boundless ocean of space. It is sacred because in its boundlessness it reverberates to the silent breathing of That, which is beyond all categories of space, time, causality and motion, and which transcends all incarnated conceptions of the true and the false, of good and evil, the meretricious and the plausible, the beautiful and the ugly.”

Meditation thought: Let the ripple and the ocean remain an invitation. What becomes possible when a helpful image is allowed to deepen understanding without being required to contain the whole truth?

6. R.N. Iyer — “The Spectrum of Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 270.

“There is no higher way of bridging mind and matter than the *AUM*, the Soundless Sound. Even if one cannot pronounce it aloud, one may reflect upon *AUM*. In this there is no West or East. There is not a single human being on earth who cannot engage in deep reflection upon the opening of the mouth, the holding of the breath and the closing of the mouth. To engage in this meditation is to begin to reflect upon the origin, the maintenance and the dissolution of the cosmos, upon the beginning of human life on earth in any incarnation, the continuance of that life, and the graceful ending of life at the solemn moment when death comes as a deliverer and friend. *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, creation, preservation and destruction-regeneration, apply to the cosmos as they apply to man. They are perfectly expressed in the *AUM*, the Soundless Sound; therein lies not just the act of bridging mind and matter, but the possibility of bridging mind and matter on the most universal plane.”

Meditation thought: Reflect on beginning, continuance and completion as belonging to one life. Bring gratitude to the phase you are in, and care to the responsibilities that accompany it.

7. R.N. Iyer — “The Spectrum of Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 270.

“The mystical power of sound to bridge the dual streams of ideation and form is the basis for the progressive awakening of the pure potency of the Perceiver. Mystically, the inward and sacrificial invocation of the Soundless Sound awakens the noetic intelligence that in turn lights up the higher centres in the human being. Within the array of human vestures there are many centres of latent life-energy; at the most fundamental and archetypal level, however, there are seven such centres.”

Meditation thought: Consider what a more discerning use of thought and speech would ask of motive. Let the wish to be helpful become more important than the wish to possess an unusual experience.

8. R.N. Iyer — “The Pledge of Kwan-Yin”, appendix to *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 63.

“There is a latent *Kwan-Yin* in every human being. It is the voice of conscience at the commonest level. It is the *chitkala* of the developed disciple. At the highest level it is *Nada*, the Voice of the Silence, the Soundless Sound, that which is comprehended in initiation, and ceaselessly reverberates in the *anahata*, the deathless centre of the human body, transformed into a divine temple.”

Meditation thought: Listen for the quiet claim of conscience, then examine it with honesty. Ask whether following it would make your conduct more just, more considerate and more open to correction.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Space and Self-Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, pp. 70–71.

“The Voice of the Silence is present in the seemingly still reverberation within the depths of the night ocean that seasoned sailors can experience during lonely watches. It is present too in the noontime glory of the sun, the one great root-vibration which is ceaselessly sounding and which is ever soundless. Every living being has a heart that moves in sympathy with this ceaseless pulsation, the one vibration that is the basis of all life and compassion. In essence, every human being is like a drop, identical to every other drop, within a vast shoreless sea of universal existence. All beings flow within the great universal rhythm of the Soundless Sound, the *AUM* throughout the ages.”

Meditation thought: Let the image of the shoreless sea widen the circle of concern. Carry something of that spaciousness into your attention to one person whose experience differs from your own.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Jnana Yajna”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 93.

“Even though a person has made many mistakes over many years — wasted words, harsh sounds, violent speech, empty words — even though a great deal of karma has been generated, all of which will have to be rendered in full account in future lives, nevertheless, if one truly touches the inmost core of the soundless sound and achieves that supreme sense of decisiveness, clarity, confidence, and calm, then it is possible to negate and counteract a lot of the karma produced in the past.”

Meditation thought: Recall a word that may need repairing. Let recollection lead towards a truthful acknowledgement or a kinder action, giving inward study a practical expression.

11. R.N. Iyer — “Jnana Yajna”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 94.

“Anyone who can, as a result of deep meditation, start with small beginnings and try to utter a word to help or heal another human being, or who can stay in a period of silence for the sake of some larger purpose of benefit to humanity, can come to know what it is to initiate. To gain the power of the Initiator, one must both specialize and concentrate magnetism and be attentive enough to apply a thought with such controlled precision and perfect timing to the needs of another human being, that one can make a permanent change for the good in that person's life.”

Meditation thought: Consider one small beginning that could benefit another person. Offer the word, the attentive silence or the useful act with care for its timing and its purpose.

12. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, p. 10.

“Let thy Soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun. Let not the fierce Sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer’s eye.”

Meditation thought: Allow another person’s difficulty to reach you without immediately turning away. What modest help is possible within your present circumstances?