

Om

- The Primordial Sound, The Eternal Syllable

Sabdabrahm being generated by the cosmic impulse of *Brahm* is eternal; its physical manifestation in sonic vibrations also continues to exist forever. As per the *Vedik* scriptures, its first realization was – the self-existent, primordial *Nāda* (musical sound) of “ॐ” (*Om*). Physical perception of this sound is described to be similar to what one would hear from the resonant notes of the tinkling vibrations of a big gong struck by a wooden hammer in a consistent manner (e.g. during the devotional prayers - *āratis* in the



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temples). In terms of phonetics, the pronunciation of *Om̐* is described as - *au..3m̐*: 'au' stretched with a stress almost 3 times higher than ordinary 'short' or 'long' vowels, followed by the *anuswāra* - sound of the nasal sign (*m̐*). The syllable “ॐ” for this universal sound “*Om̐*” (often referred as *om* or *aum* by the Westerners) in ancient Sanskrit script is a monogram of this sound. All the activities and the order in this world are said to be generated and harmoniously regulated through the origin of this omnipresent subliminal sound.

The phonemes of the *Vedic* hymns and the seven fundamental nodes - *Sā, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* of the Indian classical music have originated (distinctly recognized by the *Rishis*) from the vibrations of the sublime sound of *Om̐* in the Nature. The Vedic quote - '*Ekohaṁ Bahusyāmī* ' implies that all the sounds, all the energies, all the motions and everything existing in the universe have originated from the vibrations of this single *anāhata nāda*. This is the source of the manifestation of the *Śabda-Brahm̐* and the *Nāda Brah̐m̐*.

Om̐ (*aum*) became the sacred word *hum* of the Tibetans, *amin* of the Moslems, and *amen* of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Christians. *Amen* in Hebrew means - sure, faithful. The biblical passage, John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The New Testament declares that in the beginning God was the Word. According to the Bible, then, heaven and earth-the cosmos-issued forth from the Word.

(By “Word” is meant “pure sound” here, because there can't be any language or 'word' in the primordial existence).

Paramahansa Yogananda also mentions of “*Om*” as the 'Word' of the Bible, as the Holy Spirit. According to Yogananda, all aspiring yogis seek to commune with “*Om*” and understand it. Audible utterance of this sound produces a sense of sacredness... However, real understanding of “*Om*” is obtained only by hearing it internally and then becoming one with it in all creation.

The *Om* sound of the self-inspired evolutionary pulse of the omnipresent supreme consciousness force (*Brahm*) has three divine manifestations in the sublime domains of Nature; those of creation (God Brahma), preservation/execution (God Vishnu) and transformation (God Shiva). The vibratory cosmic energy of this eternal sound regenerates the life-force and vital spiritual energy of the one who utters it repeatedly at consistent, rhythmic pace with deep breathing, mental concentration and reverence. As a consequence one feels emotional soothing and rejuvenation of mind - body system. This simple practice also motivates introvert experience.

The syllable and sound “*Om*” is a vital part of the science of yoga. It's a tool, a phenomenon, a mystery. To many people in the modern times, “*Om*” (*aum*) is just a word chanted in meditation or as a closing prayer in yoga practice. However, as translator and *Bhagavad Gita* scholar Barbara S Miller notes, “according to the ancient Indian traditions

preserved in the *Upanishads*, all speech and thought are derived from the one self-existent sound - *Om*. It expresses the ultimate reality."

The Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad states that, "The eternal sound (*Om*) is the supreme Absolute." It is the musical sound (*Nāda*) generated by the cosmic vibration of *Brahm* that resulted in the manifestation of Nature and all creation.

Paramahansa Yogananda called it "the vibration of the Cosmic Motor." The great pioneer of yoga, Patanjali, advised using it to overcome the obstacles and distractions in life that are like stone walls in the path of enlightenment.

"Om" and The Big-Bang Theory of Modern Sciences:

"Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Capra presents intriguing parallels between Yogic philosophy and Western science concerning the origins and nature of the universe. In "Light On The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali" B.K.S. Iyengar, states - "Sound is vibration, which, as modern science tells us, is the source of all creation".

Contemporary scientific explanation of the creation of universe seems to point in the same direction. And just as exciting, these explanations agree completely with the teachings and philosophy of Yoga. The following report quoted by Shumacher further confirms this interpretation.

Washington Post Staff Writer Kathy Sawyer had presented an interesting review of the research findings of astrophysicists under the title "Calculating Contents of Cosmos". The newspaper article highlighted the current theory that the universe is made up primarily of stuff astronomers call "dark matter" and "dark energy". Only 4.5% is ordinary matter, which the author described as "all the shining stars and galaxies, plus people, computers, cats and so on....".

It further stated that, "Three independent teams of astronomers yesterday presented the most precise measurements to date of the infant universe., exposing telltale reverberations they called *the music of creation*.... The research teams reached back across time and space to take precise readings of light emitted about 400,000 years after the Big Bang explosion that gave birth to the universe".

The article quoted John Carlstrom of the University of Chicago as saying, "We're looking back as far as you can go with light - 14 billion years, or roughly the age of the universe... In a sense, 'the ancient knowledge' allow us to 'see' sound in the early universe."

Indeed "*Om*" is this sound which was realized by the Vedic *Rishis* (the ancient seers, sages and yogis) through their peer search (by the inner eye) of the sublime world and which is now being conceived (with the help of high-tech

telescopes and super computers) by the modern researchers as the '*music of creation*'.

Healing Effects of Chanting “Om”:

Om is a way of deepening the concentration of the mind, which leads to realization of the divine. This mantra may be sounded aloud, whispered, or repeatedly enunciated mentally. The correct pronunciation of “*Om*” is to pronounce it with rhythm so that the “*au*” (*O*) sound is blown out and the “*m*” (*m*) sound is reverberated within. In “The Yoga Book” author Steven Sturgess offers a technique for chanting *Om* (“*om*” or, “*aum*” as the author cites). He suggests - begin meditation by chanting “*Om*” aloud for ten minutes, then chant “*Om*” in a whisper for the next ten minutes, and then mentally chant “*Om*” for ten minutes. Finally, be still and meditate on the spiritual eye (the point between your eyebrows, deep inside the forehead). Surrender into the vibrations of *Om*..... Feel your awareness expanding still further into the field of pure consciousness, become one with *Om* -- Sturgess says.

As per the experts like *John Schumacher* and teachers of yoga and mental well-being, while chanting *Om* (*a...u..m* as we hear it, or *aum*) we begin with our mouths wide open and gradually close our lips as the sound progresses, we transition physically as well as mentally from projecting ourselves into the material outer world to redirecting ourselves into the sublime world of the inner self.

It is further mentioned in the science of yoga that the sound 'a' starts in our chests at the heart center (*Anāhata Chakra*), moves upward with the 'o' sound in the throat center (*Viśuddha Chakra*), and ends with the sound 'm' (mmm), which vibrates the higher centers in the head (*Ājñā* and *Sahasrāra Chakras*). Thus, it represents and enhances the upward movement of *prāṇic* energy along the spine that occurs as we progress in our practice.

The “Self-Realization Fellowship”, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1920, offers instructions on its Website for using the Yogananda's “*aum* healing technique”. Yogananda noted that everything in the universe is composed of energy and that the apparent differentiation between solids, liquids, gases, sound, and light is merely a difference in their vibratory rates. He maintained that by chanting “*Om*”, the divine vibration, we can increase the body's supply of cosmic energy and even direct it as a healing force to any part of the body, mind, and soul.

The thorough research works of Dr. Nagendra et al¹⁻³ at the Vivekananda Yoga Kendra, (deemed university “VYASA”) Prashanti Kuteeram, Bangalore has scientifically signified the healing power of chanting *Om* and meditating upon its syllable.

It is said that 12,000 recitations of *aum* (*Om*) remove all sins, while 12,000 recitations daily for a period of one year bring realization of the Absolute (*Brahm*). If that seems a little overwhelming, the yoga teachers say, simply try

chanting *aum* in your daily meditation and let the incredible power of sound and vibration work for you. This will bring your mind to a singular (yet universal) focus.

If one plucks or strikes one of the strings on a guitar, for instance, the other strings, though unplucked themselves, nonetheless vibrate in resonance with the vibration from that plucked string. In a similar sense, all of creation (in Nature) is nothing more or less than strings vibrating in resonance with the First Vibration or Word. Rhythmic chanting of this word “*Om*” and meditating upon its sound is like attempting to tune our mental vibrations with this divine sound. Greater concentration and deeper feeling with sincere practice resonates this sound silently within our minds at a steady pace, synchronized with the pulse of this Great Cosmic Ooze.

The Syllable:

Omkāra (the symbol representing the sound *Om*) is said to have been visualized by the *rishis* in the state of deep trance. This symbol (syllable of the *Grantham* or *Prākṛit* language - the origin of ancient Sanskrit), in modern scientific terms must have been the spectrograph of the sound realized by the Vedic sages. They had devised the first ever script of syllables based on the 'shapes' of the different acoustic manifestations of this sound.

There are many meanings behind this sacred Vedic syllable. Some regard it as a symbolic representation of the core of

cosmic energy field. George Feuerstein in “The Yoga Tradition” says – The syllable of *Om* is held to be or to express the pulse of the cosmos itself. It was through meditative practice rather than intellectual speculation that the seers and sages of Vedic times arrived at the idea of a universal sound, eternally resounding in the universe, which they 'saw' as the very origin of the created world.

In terms of Sanskrit phonemes, the decomposition of the gross (and audible) sound of *Om* is written (in the *Devnagari* script of this language) as – – (a) + – (u) + – (ṁ). The experts of the 'Akshar Yoga' (science of syllables) also attribute the geometrical segmentation of the shape “ॐ” as a combination of the shapes of the above letters/vowels.

In the introduction to 'Light On Yoga', B.K.S. Iyengar devotes nearly two pages to the various meanings of “*Om*”. In his views, the letter 'a' symbolizes the conscious or waking state, 'u' the dream state, and the letter 'ṁ' the dreamless deep sleep (trance like) state of the mind and spirit. The entire symbol, Iyengar says, stands for the “realization of man's divinity within himself.” An analogous decipheration is also applied to the geometric shape of *Omkāra*. Spectral analysis of the gross sound of *Om* and its decompositions and simultaneous analysis of the brain-impulses and bio-energy waves while meditating upon this sacred sound would give new dimensions to modern scientific research, thus unfolding the annals of secret knowledge of the Vedas.

References (on Healing effects):

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3. Telles, S., R. Nagarathna, and H.R. Nagendra (1998): Autonomic Changes while Mentally Repeating Two Syllables - One Meaningful and the Other Neutral. *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology* 42; pp 57-63.

