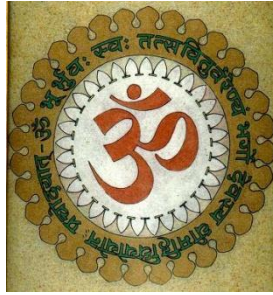


OM: One God Universal Garland of Offerings #6

Om ityetaḍ Aksharam idaṁ Sarvaṁ--Māṇḍūkya.

**Om is All
All is OM**



**Offered
By
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(Om Loves Me)**

**Omshantisvasti from
Murarilal Nagar**

**Om Shanti Mandiram
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Brahma Praṇava

Alyette Degraçes



The word OM, according to the Taittirīya texts, has many meanings like beginning (*ārambha*), acceptance (*svīkāra*), auspicious (*maṅgala*), assent (*anumati*) and the *praṇava*. In the Upanishads, however, it appears for the first time as a sacred syllable with mystical connotations. In this connection, OM is considered an object of profound religious meditation, the highest spiritual efficacy being attributed not only to the whole word but to the component sounds *a*, *u*, and *m* and their mode of enunciation. Two aspects of OM are highlighted in this paper, namely, OM as a *mantra* intended for some specific types of ascetics and OM as Brahman, also called the *brahma praṇava*.

The sacred and mystic syllable OM considered in its two forms is OM as Brahman, the *brahma praṇava* and the *mantra* intended for the last two orders of ascetics, namely, Turīyātīta and Avadhūta.¹ More than a *mantra*, OM as a Brahman in a cycle, gathering by itself the diverse values of OM according to the different states of the Self in the human being. Mainly for this reason the Upaniṣads consider OM as Brahman (*brahma-praṇava*).

¹ *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad*, VIII, 1; *Nṛsiṃhottara-tāpini Upaniṣad*, 1, 2.

The syllable OM has three sounds, *a*, *u*, *m*; and they represent the triple values of the sound—of creation, of conservation, and of destruction; all the potentialities are thus included in OM under the three functions of the sound. The sound ‘*a*’ is what exists, what has been manifested; the sound ‘*u*’, what is preserved; the sound ‘*m*’ points out the functions of destruction. Probably the term *Śabda-Brahman* denotes the manifestation of the Brahman by the meditation of the sound.² The revelation of the absolute by the speech is better understood if the sound carries in itself the powers of manifesting, preserving, and destroying.

The speech appears in various forms: “I have many states, I enter in many (forms),”³ says the hymn dedicated to *vāk*. This transmutation gives to the speech, a fruitful and creative aspect. It carries within the creative forces of the universe, the energy; as such it is compared to mothers. And such speech is not informative, but formative, in the sense that it gives form; it creates the visible as shown in some brahmanical stories: “Prajapati was himself all alone in the universe; *vāk* was in him, *vāk* was his second. He thought: I want to let this speech (*vāk*) out; it will go changing ad *infinitum*; that what was completely up-wards, it will develop just as the drop of water.”⁴ Though *vāk* belongs to Prajāpati it must go forth from him, and be emitted in order that the beings shall be manifested. There are some other stories where Prajāpati does not create speech, but he uses it to create the universe.⁵ Uttering the three *vyāhṛtis*; *bhūḥ*, *bhuvah*, *svah* he created the earth, the intermediate space, and the sky.⁶

The four divisions of this power, namely the speech-potentiality, are: The first state in the order of the descent from the Brahman is the Supreme Power (*parā-vāk*) of the unmanifested. The second—the power of ‘vision’ (*paśyantī*), the first mobile aspect of *parā*, an immediate knowledge and support of the sound—is the *Śabda-Brahman* itself. It is the state of knowledge and consciousness of the absolute. These first two states are still at the supreme cosmic level (*Īśvara*). The third state situated in the

² *Brahmabindu Upaniṣad*, 17.

³ *Rgveda*, X. 125. 3.

⁴ *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa*, XX. xiv. 2.

⁵ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, VI. 1.1.3.

⁶ *Op. Cit.*, XI. 1.6.3.

middle is *madhyamā*. Of course, its order is between the *paśyantī* and the last articulate state.

The last state manifests the name of the completely spread out sound power (*vaikharī*); it is a name, for the power does not have any more a function; it is manifested as the movement of the sound is totally defined in the articulated speech belonging to the tangible field of the gross forms (*sthūla*). This sound, becoming speech is a directly audible sound (*śrautaśabda*), the manifested and visible energy. *Vaikharī*, gross speech, includes all the forms of the universal element. This worldly speech (*virāṭ-śabda*) is opposed to the supreme power of sound, the causal energy in form of light and that is never heard (*aśrotra-viśaya*). *Parā vāk* is unmanifested; it is a mere position of the absolute while the three other states exist in the manifested body. Beyond the four states there is in the human being the silence (*mauna*) and in the cosmic level, the Brahman, that is no more the sound, but the non-sound (*a-śabda brahman*).

All this leads to the renunciant to fuse his speech in the *praṇava*, OM. The collective speech of the renunciant commands a double state: of the separation, the distance from the whole here represented by the primary sound, and at the same time its state of connection with it. By this process, consisting in bringing the speech basically to the only syllable OM, the *sanyāsin* (namely the Paramahansa), regulates his individual speech (either profane or ritual) to the whole; giving up Veda and *mantra* he elevates it from a certain limitation by opening it to its cosmic primitive measure. The path is found again; the individual part is resorbed. The sound OM in the macrocosmic level gathers the creative force; in the individual level it is the breath in which the renunciant has absorbed the fire.

To Nārada's question relating to the *Praṇava*, Brahmā answers: "That is OM; That is the Brahman."⁷ It is in two forms, individual and universal! (*vyaṣṭī-samaṣṭī-prakāreṇa*). The individual form (*vyaṣṭī*) represents the distinct parts of the whole, the

⁷ *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad*, VIII. 1.

multiple in the One or the One manifested in the multiple. “I am Brahman”⁸, expresses this individual form. But if all these parts gather in one collection to form this multiple, a state in which each element is consubstantial with the whole, in which the entirety alone matters, we know the universal form (*samaṣṭi*). From the statement “I am Brahman,” we come to “OM is the Brahman”.

The Praṇava being the power of OM, otherwise called ‘spontaneous’ (*anāhata*),⁹ rests on the triple value of the sound, bringing about relation between the different states of the Self and the stages of the manifestation. The *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad* (VII. 9) divides first the *praṇava* in three modes; OM as the sound of the human (*manuṣya-praṇava*) or OM as the external sound composed of four units and intended for the renunciants Kuṭīcaka and Bahūdaka; OM as the internal sound (*āntara-praṇava*) of eight units is for the Haṃsa and Paramahaṃsa; then OM as Brahma; (*brahma-praṇava*) of sixteen units is reserved only for the two last orders of ascetics, the Turīyātīta and the Avadhūta. These diverse modes of *praṇava* describe, in fact, a way to the knowledge through the only sound OM.

The *Nārada-Parivrājaka Upaniṣad* (VIII) divides OM as Brahman (*brahma-praṇava*) in three forms. OM as the sound of creation (*sṛṣṭi-praṇava*), OM as the sound of destruction or resorption (*saṃhāra-praṇava*): the former belongs to the manifested field, it has attributes (*saguṇa*); the latter signifies the resorption of forms, it is without attributes (*nirguṇa*). The third form is OM as the internal and external sound (*antar-bahiḥ-praṇava*), It is called *ubhaya-praṇava*, for it has attributes and is without one at the same time. But the OM as Brahman (*brahma-praṇava*) is more than these three divisions. Besides these three sounds of OM, there exists a primitive sound OM as the sound of the origin (*utpatti-praṇava*). It is the first position out of the absolute and corresponds with the first state of the creation during the process of emergence or of epiphany; indefinite and definite aspects of the still unmanifested forms: OM as the sound of the origin is a sound with attributes and without attributes (*nirguṇa-saguṇa*).

⁸ Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1. 4. 10.

⁹ Also refer for the *anāhata mantra* -- *Nirvāṇa Upaniṣad*, 59; *Paramahaṃsa-parivrājaka Upaniṣad*, 4.

Indeed the sound OM is one. Also this unique sound OM contains many units of sound. However, these divisions correspond with states that are too subtle to be described and even felt.

The sound of creation represents OM as figuring the beginning of manifestation. It points out the appearance of the multiple. Composed of one unit (*mātrā*) the main element of the *praṇava* is the a: it is the dominant (*pradhāna*); this unit is no more the attributeless one, but the one is the process of manifestation. On the contrary the sound of resorption (*samhāra-praṇava*) denotes the sound OM as annihilating the manifestation. We must understand here that the conclusive movement represents thus the renunciant seeking liberation. The *praṇava* OM gathers and destroys the appearance of the sound forms; it comprises of the three units and the three units resorb into it. At this stage the element *m* forms the dominant. Among the gods associated with the order of the syllables, the Trimūrtis reign here: Rudra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu; Rudra or Śiva leads the triad giving precedence to the destructive aspect. After this there is no division.

OM is both the internal and external sound (*antar-bahiḥ*) at the micro and macro cosmic levels respectively for the human being in quest of knowledge. OM as internal sound (*antaḥ*) is of eight units and is situated at the level of creation. In the case of the human, it belongs to the gross speech, having a place in the last state of the manifestation itself. OM as the external sound (*bahiḥ*) is composed of four units and is connected with the complete deployment of forms, with all the elements (*viśva*) of the gross field; it is said to be exterior to the human according to the order of appearance of the speech from inside to outside. This OM as external sound supposes the precedence of OM as internal sound. With OM as both the sounds, *ubhaya* (internal and external), we reach the cosmic level. This highest level is experienced by the renunciant. In taking the units of these three values of the sound OM, OM as the internal sound, external sound and the *ubhaya* (both) we have the successive eight, four and sixteen units.

Each sound of OM receives an equivalent sound of OM specifying the meaning. OM as internal sound is called OM as the sound giving expression (*vyāvahārika-praṇava*): induced from the three previous states in the human—the sound that is the power situated in the middle (*madhyamā*), the power of ‘vision’ (*paśyantī*) and the supreme power (*parā*)—it indicates the achievement of the sound in the speech, in one name, *vaikharī*. The element ‘a’ represents the whole speech: *akāro vai sarvā vāk*. Durgā presides over this state of affirming clearly the aspect of manifestation. The goddess represents the *śakti*, the manifested and unmanifested energy. OM as *ubhaya* is OM as the sound of position (*sthiti*), made of two units and fulfilling the function of protection, of conservation of the whole; it sets up all the multiple aspects of the universe; it is the analytic form by excellence (*vyaṣṭī*). It is otherwise called OM as the sound of the wise (*ārṣa-praṇava*); as such it designates the *omkāra* understood by the ṛṣi. In its individual form of OM as the eternal sound, it grows into the synthesised form, the *samaṣṭī* as mediators the ṛṣis elevate the speech to its high abode, and inverting the movements, “bring it to the human.”¹⁰ This OM signifies the relation of the human to the whole but under a still individual aspect. OM as visualised by the renunciates is different; over it reigns the Lord of the *virāj* (that illuminates) and the inner self (*antaryāmin*). OM as the *ubhaya* sound manifests OM as the illuminating cosmic sound (*virāṭ-praṇava*). This OM signifies the relation of the human to the whole but under universal aspect. OM as the cosmic sound is the knowledge of the two aspects of the world.

OM is the illuminating sound (*virāṭ-praṇava*) of sixteen units according to the Tantra and Śākta schools.¹¹ The sixteen units of the sound constitute the aspects of it that must be understood in and as a process of knowledge. They are – the sound *a*, the sound *u*, and the sound *m*, the sound in half-unit (*ardha-mātrā*), the *nāda*, the aspects of *kalā*, beyond its aspects, *kalātīta*, the power of *śānti*, the power beyond *śānti*, being *śāntyatīta*, the *unmanī*, the *manonmanī*, the *parā*, the *pura*, the *purī*, the *madhyamā*, the *paśyantī*, and the sound being the supreme power, *parā*. At this time the duality

¹⁰ Exactly “to divide,” Rgveda, X. 71.3.

¹¹ See A. Avalon, *The Garland of letters*, Madras.

does not exist; the state of consciousness rises when the spirit remains without modifications, perplexed; with the cessation of the mind the self enters the fortress symbolising the state of union with the supreme soul.

Thus sixteen units are the symbols of the whole. The *Paramahaṃsa-parivrājakopaniṣad* (4) indicates it clearly in sub-dividing each of the four states of the Self in four places and connecting thus the states of consciousness with the individual form of the self. All these indicating subtle gradations cannot be understood but only experienced. In each degree, in each state, the whole is played again with the same elements and in starting again each time from the beginning. The multiplication each state in four degrees points out explicitly that each degree in itself contains already in its level all the diversified manifestations. The renunciant meditating on the Om is thus enabled to go over the four-fold states of the manifestations according to the four-fold subdivisions. Four by four, there are sixteen parts defining the whole, the mystical number *par excellence*. Everything is played again and reaches completion inside the renunciant.

These sixteen parts can once more be gathered in four global units implying the four sub-divisions. The Upaniṣads¹² associate the sound *a* with the waking state, *u* with the dreaming state, *m* with the deep-sleep state and the *ardha-mātrā* with the fourth state (*turīya*). Here OM as the illuminating sound (*virāt-praṇava*), corresponding to the universal form (*samaṣṭi*), is gathered and unified in the supreme syllable (*paramākṣara*).

With the *ardhamātra-praṇava*, OM as the sound of creation (*śṛṣṭi*) ends. These are the four forms of the sound corresponding to the four states; it is no more the concern of the individual self (*jīva*), but of the universal Self given by the form of consciousness or of the intelligence (*caitanya*) that belongs to each state. The four units are called *otr* [? See *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad, Upadeśa 8.7: Jñātānujñātṛ...*] *anujñātṛ*, *anyjñānaikarasa* and the undifferentiated, *avikalpa*,

¹² *Paramahaṃsaparivrājaka Upaniṣad, 4; Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, 4.*

respectively associated with *a*, *u*, *m*, and the *ardha-mātra*: these four states of the consciousness are connected with the gross, subtle and causal forms.

The four forms of consciousness lead, according to the order, to the ultimate state the *turīya-tyrīya*, the syllable OM; considered in its entirety, it gets then the two forms, the individual and the universal (*vyāṣṭi-samaṣṭi*). It marks the end of the goal. All the forms fadeaway and all the opposition disappears (*niṣpratiyoga*). After all the given distinctions, one reaches the unity.

Two points must be noted. The fourth, *turya* or *turīya* can be called the *tatastha*, the “neutral”¹³ designating the neuter gender of the Brahman. The idea of the neutral suggests reaching beyond the contraries and the genders. The same idea of going beyond, leads the *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad* (VI. 2) to conceive a fifth state, the *turiyātīta*, literally beyond the *turīya*; *turiyātīta* represents the unity of these four states. The state of union of the individual and universal forms (*vyāṣṭi, samaṣṭī*), the ultimate state called *turiya-turiya* or the unity *turyātīta* are achieved by the renunciant.

The renunciant perceives everything as OM. The universe is OM.¹⁴ By repeating OM, he has made a vibratory body, a ‘sound-body’. It is figured by the metaphor, by the friction of the fire-wood (*araṇI*) that is OM, with the wood of the body, rises the knowledge of the hidden god.¹⁵

The renunciant goes through successively the diverse and subtle states; by the return of the speech in the sound, he reaches the causal body, that in the inferior level corresponds to the deep-sleep state, and in the superior level to the state of the fourth (*turīya*). He gains the pure state of consciousness. Thus does he pass from the state of *jīva* or individual self to that of *caitanya* or universal self of consciousness. He touches the last measure, the state of contemplation in the form of the sound OM. According to L de LaVallee Poussin, “The person that is born of a death is neither the

¹³ *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad*, Vi. 4.

¹⁴ *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1. 8.

¹⁵ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 1. 14.; *Kaivalya Upaniṣad*, 1. 11.

same than this who is dead, nor differs”.¹⁶ This is the whole invisible work of the renunciant.

The ‘sound-body’ constitutes to the renunciant an open form where there is the presence of Brahman, namely an empty form fulfilled by the only Brahman. Because the sound is knowledge, it leads to the Brahman; it raises as an hierophantes until the formless of which it is measure and meditation: “Indeed two Brahmans have to be meditated: that which is sound, and that which is non-sound. By the sound, the non-sound is manifested. OM is the sound. By OM the sound escapes upwards and goes to vanish into the non-sound....This is the union, the perfected return to the One.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *The way of nirvāṇa*. Cambridge, 1947.

¹⁷ *Maitrī Upaniṣad*. VI.22.

CRITIQUE OF 'OM'
TASYA VĀCAKAḤPRAṆAVAḤ
(Yogasūtra 1.27)

T. S. Rukmani

Hinduism with its long history of development and because of its antiquity is not easy to be identified with one single idea, one single image, or one single symbol. And yet this is precisely what has happened with the symbol 'Om' coming to denote Hinduism in its many aspects. One of the reasons for this phenomenon may be the identity crisis that Hindus face when settled in a new environment in a foreign land. With Hindus travelling to more than a hundred countries in the past couple of centuries the need to have something akin to the cross for the Christians or the crescent moon for the Muslims or other symbols used by the people of different faiths must have been a felt need for those following the Hindu faith. This could be the reason why, cutting across differences amongst Hindus in the mode of worship, in the preferred deity to whom they surrender, in the design of the temple of *bhagavān* and in the many ways of understanding and internalising Hinduism, *Om* has come to be accepted as the single symbol (*pratīka*) that can represent all that the religion stands for. This is clearly seen when South Indian Śaiva worshippers, though not very favorable towards Sanskrit, still use *Om* written in Tamil [] to denote all that is sacred in Śaivism. All regional temples and places of worship in India have accepted the symbol and it is written in the regional language besides Sanskrit. As for temples outside India this is perhaps the one single mark of identity for all Hindus as a community. In South Africa, for instance, at the University of Durban-Westville, the Hindu centre has prominently displayed the symbol *Om* in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Gujarati. Even temples more than a hundred years old in South Africa have *Om* in front of the temples as a mark of identity. This is true of temples built in other countries like

Canada, U.S.A., England and other places as well.

Is this a new phenomenon or just a carrying over of a practice which was already part of a cultural and religious memory? It is here that one is faced with a problem of a different kind. There were many symbols in use in Hinduism even as early as the Vedic period and *Om* was only one of them. So, though the habit of identifying the faith with a symbol was not unknown, *Om* did not usurp to itself exclusively the kind of aura that has come to be invested with it in later times, very soon after the early Vedic period. Another question which then arises is if there were other symbols also along with *Om* in usage, how was *Om* alone raised to this level; there must have been some features that helped *Om* to reach this elevated position so much so that the *Bhagavad Gītā* (BG.) could confidently assert by its time that ‘Anyone remembering Me by uttering the one syllable *Om* which means [is?] Brahman, at the time of death, will reach the highest abode.’¹ Later we get the popular notion of the three syllables *a*, *u*, and *m* representing the three deities Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā and the whole *Om* transcending the three.² Examples of this exalted position of *Om* can be multiplied. This paper aims to look at the way that *Om* acquired these different meanings in its long journey starting somewhere in the Vedic times so that it was found adequate to represent Hinduism to its many diverse believers.

Our journey then must begin somewhere during the early Vedic period when Hinduism was, so to say, in the making. As the contents of the Ṛgveda (RV) reveal both simple prayer along with deep metaphysical and philosophical thought, it is now uniformly accepted that the contents of the RV. belong to different periods, perhaps separated by at least six centuries if not more.³ Some of the trends of thought in the RV. are of special significance in raising *Om* to the level it did reach in course of time. One prominent tendency present in this period and evidenced in the RV. itself is the habit of thought which makes connections between the three regions of earth, intermediate quarters and the sky,⁴; the phenomenon of apotheosis is also in the making. While in the earlier hymns deities like the sun, moon, dawn, fire, etc. were ‘transparent deification’ in some of the later hymns deification is not restricted to such of these phenomena alone, abstract conceptions are raised to the level of divinity as is seen in the hymn to Faith,⁵ in the

universal 'order' or *ṛta* spoken of as being achieved by sacrifice⁶, and in the recognition of 'the mystic power of prayer.'⁷

Theories of cosmology, cosmogony, theology, theogony and philosophical speculations regarding the ultimate principle also engaged the attention of the Vedic ṛṣis. As *yajñā* or sacrifice was the basic mode of worship in this period, many changes taking place in the world of thought were applied and tested in the world of sacrifice. Sacrifices took on a character of magic, lost their simplicity and came to be elevated to a world principle and identified with Prajapati himself. While these changes were taking place in the late Vedic period which was indeed an age rich in ideas, the further elaboration and growth of the sacrifice and other ideas were continuous and these changed course gradually from a ritualistic emphasis to an atmosphere of contemplation and intuitive insight. Already in the RV. ‘the efficacy of certain modes of address and worship and of the benevolent mood of the gods induced by it was gaining ground.’⁸

As a prelude to what could have led to the rise of *Om* to its later glorified position, I would like to study the practice of *yajñā* itself briefly from its simple beginning to its later complex and complicated development; this is being done in the belief that what could have happened with one kind of concept could, given the right atmosphere, happen to others as well in the minds of the same people. The second reason, which is perhaps more relevant to this study, is because what is traceable in the realm of *yajñā* is not so clearly discernible in the case of the symbol *Om*. But having said that, it has to be mentioned also that there is enough material to trace the process of change that could have taken place in the conception of *Om* from its early beginnings to lead weight to the theory of its having gone through more or less a similar journey as that of the concept of *yajñā*.

The three divine regions with their divine inhabitants have divinised not only the whole cosmos but in a sense those occupying the three regions as well. Thus there is the belief that humans are basically enlightened and strive to achieve a harmony in their lives for which they also seek blessings of the divine.⁹ At this stage the sacrifice is no more a mere ritual act. Man himself becomes the sacrifice and there is a ‘metaphysical unity of being’ realised by the ṛṣi in a state of enlightened existence.¹⁰ At some level the Vedic ṛṣi has made an intuitive connection between the micro and the macro levels of existence; this

would in turn lead to various explorations both in a horizontal and vertical directions as we approach the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas*, and the *Upaniṣads*.

Yajña for instance was acknowledged as acting at two levels, i.e. in the human body and in the universe, though the interaction of two polarized sources of vitality, namely the sacrificial fire (agni) and Soma.¹¹ Fire in a cosmic sense stands for the energy principle and Soma for the principle of fluidity (water). Through an imagery of the eater (fire) and that of food (Soma), the whole universe is imagined as comprised in the duality of Agni and Soma. Since this is an enactment in truth of *yajña* which is represented by both Agni and Soma, there is the idea that cosmic *yajña* is being performed continuously in the universe which in turn raises the status of sacrifice (or *yajña*) to that of a deity.¹² It even goes beyond that and 'the transcendent, mysterious and secret power of the sacrifices'¹³ replaces and usurps the place reserved for gods. This is the phenomenon one witnesses in the *Brāhmaṇs*. Further the Vedic Yajña got identified in its aspect of activity, with the *prāṇa* of the embodied self as also with the three aspects of ritual i.e., the sacrificial fire, the sacrificial altar and the Soma. This, in turn, in its three aspects (cosmic, vital and mundane) should be viewed in various groups of three, like the three speeches (Ṛg. Yajur, and Sāman), the three abodes (earth, middle region; and sky), the three deities Agni, Indra, Āditya), the three sacrificial fires āhavanīya, gārhapatya, and dākṣjñātya), the cosmological groupings of three (water, earth and fire) that in turn leading to fire having three forms (the sun, fire, and wind) and so on. Various explanations and symbolic interpretations were offered to order to relate the three in one category to the three in the other categories which brings out the ingenuity of these early thinkers. While this was one trend which was prominent in this period there was another trend towards increased mysticism and a reduction of all divine principles to a single concept of the one behind the many.¹⁴ The mystical character is enhanced when creation is spoken of as 'māyā of the gods, which as such, is beyond human comprehension.'¹⁵

We find for instance, Indra credited with the miracle of generating from his

own body his own father and mother (Ṛg. X. 54. 3); Aditi spoken as producing Dakṣa, and being in turn produced by him (X. 72. 4) this dogma being later received philosophy under the guise of the *bījāṅkura nyāya* or the maxim of the seed and the sprout.

We can now briefly state some of these directions is firstly a tendency to connect any single principle to a three level understanding; secondly, when inversely, the divergent meanings are comprehended in a higher unity, and thirdly a higher level of transcendence when the dichotomy of variety and unity is itself transcended in an enigma of beginninglessness or endlessness in which state it is not possible to attribute any one as the cause in relation to any other as the effect;¹⁶ the cause itself becomes the effect at this level and it is only the context that can decide which takes on the role of cause and which the effect .

This continuous search makes it appear that the Vedic Indian did not want to believe that the search for the ultimate had ended but it was a continuous exercise; we also get the feeling that the Vedic ṛṣi had this enormous optimism to feel that somehow through his unflinching search for connection in a multi-level way, he would be able to realise the ultimate Principle.

His interest in speculation was so deep and his sense of the mystery hiding the ultimate so keen that he kept before him unobscured the natural phenomena which he was trying to understand until he arrived at a satisfying solution. (Hiriyanna: 33).

When we look at the *Brāhmaṇas* we realize that they are not just content to make some speculations as found in the *mantra* portion but for them sacrifice becomes the be all and end all of existence. The sacrifice was one whole, raised to a level of mystification. There were prescriptions for the sacrifice with regard to ‘place, time, priests, fires, offerings, *mantas*, deities, utensils, movements, gifts, and expiations in connection with very part of ritual.¹⁷ The propriety of the prescription was sought to be justified through “etymology, history, mythology, or ...by the assumption of some sort of a mystic correspondence between things.”¹⁸

This habit continued into the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* and now we come across systematic explanations at many levels in order to establish a mystic connection between many of the earlier categories. We come across passages of great sophistication and refinement in ideas and thought process which raise one to heights of sublimity.¹⁹ As the sacrifice was now no more accorded the paramount position it once occupied, other symbols and practices took on those meanings. Thus instead of going away along with the sacrifice itself the equivalences, correlations and inter-connections which had been built between the world of gods and the world of humans just carried on comfortably with other symbols which became available for the exercise. The following extract from the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* makes interesting reading in this connection.

Thought was their ladle, intelligence their ghee, speech the altar, study the grass (*barhis*), insight the fire, knowledge the priest who kindles, breath the oblation, chanting the Adhvaryu-priest, Vācaspati the hotṛ and mind the Upavakṛ.

It was necessary to give this rather lengthy introduction in order to be able to realise the multi-level significance that *Om* came to be invested with in this period. The habit of finding equivalences and bonds between many seemingly unrelated categories and with categories that have obvious connections has been named as the *bandhutā* philosophy.²⁰ It is the *bandhutā* habit that established connections of many things with each god in the Vedic pantheon and set in motion this tendency of association of a flower, tree, animal, season of worship and so on with a specific god which got entrenched in popular purāṇic Hinduism later on.

Indra, for instance was associated with the number 11, the meter triṣṭubh, grīṣma (summer), the mid-day oblation, and so forth, with Indrāni for his wife and Agni, Soma, Varuṇa. Pushan, Bṛhaspati, Brahmaṇaspati, Parvata, Kutsa, Viṣṇu and Vāyu as his companions. (Belvaker, Ranade. 61).

And it is in the *bandhutā* philosophy that we must seek to find the origin of the mystical character of *Om*. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* has the following narration in which perhaps we find for the first time the mention of the three syllabled *Om*.²¹

He brooded over these worlds. From these worlds when brooded over three Luminaries were born. Agni was born from the earth. Vāyu from the atmosphere, and Āditya from the sky. He brooded over these luminaries. From these when brooded over the three Vedas were born. The Ṛgveda was born from Agni, the Yajurveda from Vāyu, and the Sāmaveda from Āditya. He brooded over these Vedas. From these when brooded over three pure (sounds) were Born: *Bhuḥ* was born from the Ṛgveda, *bhuvaḥ* from the Yajurveda, *sva* from Sāmaveda. He brooded over these pure ones. From these when brooded over three sounds (varṇas) were born a, u, and m. These he brought together. That made the (word) *Om*. (Belvaker, Ranade: 67).

There is still one question that has to be answered in connection with this exalted status of *Om*. There are other symbols like *hrīm*, *bhūr*, *svāhā*, *vaṣaṭ*, etc., which are also accorded a divine status in the period under discussion. But they slowly yielded place to *Om*, which increasingly added a new mystical meaning and by the time of Upaniṣads had completely relegated the other symbols to a secondary position. To my mind, the reason for this development could very well be in its three syllabled structure.

It is a matter of mystery why some numbers gain a mystic association or why some numbers appeal to the sensibilities of certain people at a point in time, then slowly gain a significance which is out of proportion to the common ground that they share with other numbers. The number three seems to have had this kind of an association in the mind of the Vedic ṛṣi as we witnessed in the passage of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* quoted above, as also in the different combinations in the three-fold connections pointed out earlier. We can add a few more examples like that of the accent of the Vedic *mantras* (*udātta*, *anudātta*, and *svarita*) the Vedas themselves reckoned as three to begin with (*Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Sāmaveda*) and the three-level interpretation of meaning: (*ādhibhautika*, *ādhidaivika*

and *ādhyātmika*); the later *trivarga puruṣārthas* (*dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*), the *trimūrti* concept (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva), the three-fold path to liberation (*jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti*) are all following the same pattern of finding a three fold grouping; later on the importance to the number three would be enacted by repeating *mantras* three times like *Om śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ*, or *Om tat sat* circling round the temple *prākāra* and the inner sanctum called *pradakṣiṇā* three times and so on.

So it would seem that the structure of Om in the three syllables assured its rise to the pre-eminent position it gained in the period of the *Upaniṣads*. Having reached that height the fate that befell other symbols which restricted them to their specific fields of activity, like *vaśaṭ* and *svāhā* to the realm of sacrifice, did not happen to OM. On the other hand, it continued to grow in stature and reached its acme of growth in the *Māṇḍukyopaniṣad* (Māṇḍ. Up.) where it appears to accommodate *Advaita Vedānta* by adding an additional notion of *ardhmātra* corresponding to the fourth or *tūrīya* aspect of spiritual awareness.

This paper now examines the lengthy journey Om undertook from the time of the *Brāhmaṇas* to the period of the Māṇḍ.Up. and try[?] to trace the various routes traversed before *Om* came to occupy the place it has today in Hinduism. It shall not, however, carry the journey further than the Māṇḍ.Up. for it is well known that the Māṇḍ.Up. is considered “the last of the great *Upaniṣads* of the older canon.”²² The later development of Hinduism as a religion was more in the field of devotion and *bhakti*; the *bhakti* schools had no difficulty in borrowing ideas from the *Upaniṣads* both in its religion and philosophy and so in popular Hinduism we are witness to the wholesale appropriation of the symbol *Om* into the *bhakti* milieu.

Before we start on this journey it is good to remember that all the *Upaniṣads* that are known today of which there are over two hundred²³ do not belong to the period under discussion. There are many sectarian *Upniṣads* like the *Vaiṣṇava*, *Śaiva*, *Śākta*, etc. which are clearly later. Dara Shkoh, in his time, between the years 1656-57, got some fifty *Upaniṣads* translated into Persian at Delhi.²⁴ But the early *Upaniṣads* considered to be pre-Buddhist²⁵ and which were quoted by Śaṅkarācārya in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* are only

thirteen. Belvalkar and Ranade by their painstaking effort have been able to point out not only a chronological table for the early *Upaniṣads* but have used some valuable pointers to distinguish the relative chronology within the contents of a single *Upaniṣad*²⁶ itself. For the purpose of this paper I have treated each *Upaniṣad* as belonging to one period as it appeared that as far as the study of *Om* is concerned, it would not seriously affect the conclusion. I have also used only the so-called early *Upaniṣads* such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (Br.Up.), *Chāndogya* (Chānd.Up.), *Taittirīya* (Taitt.Up.), *Kāṭhaka* (Kāṭh.Up.), *Muṇḍaka* (Muṇḍ.Up.), *Śvetāśvatara* (Śvet.Up.), *Praśna* (Praś.Up.), *Maitrāyaṇī* (Mait.Up.) and the *Māṇḍūkya* (Māṇḍ.Up) *Upaniṣads* for this purpose. These are the well-recognized early *Upaniṣads* and are thus relevant to the search for the origin and growth of *Om*.

At this point in our journey we have to know that somewhere along the line the *sāman* chant called *udgītha* (from the fact of singing aloud derived from *Ud + gai* with the affix (ṭhak) came to be identified with *Om* itself.²⁷ Thus, while the *udgātṛ* was the singer of *sāmans* and *udgītha* stood for chanting of the *sāmaveda* in general, gradually *udgītha* took on the meaning of *Om* itself.²⁸ In the first *prapāṭhaka* of the Chānd. Up. *udgītha* is identified with *Om* and all miraculous powers are attributed to *Om*. *Om* in this section has acquired all the mystical nuances, connecting it with both the micro and macro dimensions in vogue. What happened in the case of *yajna* during the *Brahmaṇa* period was being transferred to other areas of activity that were gaining importance like *upāsana* and intuitive knowledge (*jnāna*, *vijnāna*) during this time. The exclusive paramountcy of *jnāna* has been lost forever and we find that the model which was being set was one of intuitive insight as the ultimate goal to be achieved. Thinkers in this period of ferment were venturing into speculations regarding world creation, theories about the Ultimate self, epistemological experiments, ontological inquiries, ethical and moral questioning and such other thought.²⁹ But in all of this venturing into new territory they could not discard the past completely; the method of making connection and interconnections was still retained.³⁰ This is what one witnesses in the case of the *udgītha*.³¹

In the Chānd.Up., *udgītha* or three syllabled *Om* is spoken of in the same breath as “the three Vedas, the three *vyāhrtis*, or holy sounds--*bhūh*, *bhuvah*, *svah*.”³² On *yajña* and the

associated cosmology making way for new explorations the same *udgītha*, in course of time, became the symbol for various *upāsanās* with its multi-level interpretations. The later Vedic period is a rich storehouse of abstract principles and symbolic devices employed to tide over any tight situation. Thus Prajāpati, the first principle in the Brahmanic period surrenders his place to *Ātman* (whose exact meaning is still difficult to divine) and also to *Brahman* which somehow gets equated with *Ātman*; *Puruṣa*, *sat*, and even *tamas* are substituted in a process which is trying to understand and explain the origin of the universe in terms of the understanding of the ‘philosopher priest’.³³ When gradually *Brahman* came to stay as the Upaniṣadic Absolute, anything that had to be raised to the highest status could be equated with *Brahman* and its paramount position would be assured. Such attempts and equivalences are in abundance and in the Taitt.Up. we find *Om* itself being spoken of as *Brahman*.³⁴ Having already gained its unique position in Ait. Brah.³⁵ it was quite easy to accord this status to *Om*. The Śatapatha Brāh. in a similar tone states that *Brahman* is all that is or is to be and yet is merely just one syllable (*Om*).³⁶

Thus we can state that by the time of the *Upaniṣads*, *Om* called variously as the *Udgītha* or *Praṇava* had reached a state of uniqueness and considered equal to *Brahman*. In the earlier *Upaniṣads* like the Br.Up. the *Udgītha* is clubbed together with other contenders for supremacy. We thus find *prāṇa* equated with *Āṅgīrasa Bṛhaspati*, *Sāma* and *udgīhta*.³⁷ But for the Chānd.Up. *udgītha* identified with *Om* is the essence of all that matters; the spiritual significance of *Om* has been emphasized and it is sought to be expressed in many ways.³⁸ The second part of section 23 of the second *prapāthaka* talks of the importance of *Om* as follows:³⁹

“As a number of leaves might be held together by a spike which passes through them [wrong, dead wrong!]⁴⁰ so is all this world held together by the *Om* which interpenetrates it.”

It is important to note that both the Br.Up. and the Chānd.Up. are familiar only with the three syllabled *Om* and nowhere in these *Upaniṣads* is the fourth *ardhamātra* mentioned. In the second section of the first *adhyaṅya* of the Br.Up. vital *prāṇa* raised to the status of

the highest deity is identified with many things including the *udgītha*. “He is also *sāman* because he is ‘equal’ (*sama*) to a grub, a gnat, an elephant, the world or the universe. He is also the *udgītha*, for he really ‘up’ holds the universe...”⁴¹

In the Taitt.Up.⁴² we get a suggestion of the fourth state of the ultimate in the teaching imparted to *Prachinayoga*[?] by his *guru*. In pointing out the path by which the human self called *manomaya puruṣa* joins with the ultimate Brahman situated in the heart called *manasaspati*, there is a fourth stage recognized which is identified with *Brahman*. Many things are here identified with *Brahman* and thus a new path is paved for whosoever wants to accommodate a fourth world beyond the three known worlds which in course of time could well have developed into a fourth, *turīya* or syllableless *praṇava* identified with the Ultimate. But in the Taitt.Up. there is only a suggestion of what was yet to happen in the Māṇḍ,Up. Mystic utterances in the Taitt.Up. describing the oneness of existence like “Oh, Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!...Am I not myself all this material existence? Am I not also the sole enjoyer of it all? Am I not again the maker of their unity?”⁴³ would make it easier for the *Upaniṣads* like the Māṇḍ,Up. to take the leap into the fourth dimension and find a corresponding *ardhamātra Om* to correspond that state, in the wake of the dominant trend of the *Upaniṣads* leaning towards non-duality.

The mystic element in association with Om is further embellished in the Kath. Up. for instance when the spiritual aspirant is told to meditate on the symbol of Om as identified with both; the lower *Brahman* (*Hiraṇyagarbha*) and the higher *Brahman*.⁴⁴ Om is also lifted away from the field of speech and words and assigned a mystic status when the Kath. Up. elevates *Om* to the highest state on the one hand and relegates all other learning and reasoning (which are based on words and are through words) to a lower status.

The Muṇḍ.Up. compares Om or *Praṇava* (incidentally this is the first among the old Upaniṣads to equate Om to *Praṇava*) to the bow and the Self to the arrow; *Brahman* is the target to which the attention of the disciple is to be drawn without any distraction.⁴⁵

The Śvet.Up. repeats the rubbing of the two pieces of wood in a metaphor of “mystic meditation.”⁴⁶ *Om* is the upper wood here while the body is the underwood [lower?] and meditation is the means to achieve realisation of the Supreme.⁴⁷ [What about churning? *Nirmathana?*]⁴⁸

Om figures prominently in the Praśna.Up. and is connected with meditation and the results on different *mātrās* singly and in combination. Continuous meditation on the first *mātrā* of *Om* till one approaches death enables one to reach the world of men, carried over by the Ṛk.verses; but after a time he comes back to the earth; the person who meditates on two *mātrās* on the other hand, is guided by the *yajus* verse to the world of the moon and comes back to the earth in course of time; but the one who meditates on all the three *mātras* of *Om* “is taken over by the Sāman verses to the world of the sun; and as a snake may be freed from its slough, so he is freed from all evil.”⁴⁹ He apparently does not come to the earth again. This is the teaching of Pippalāda regarding meditation on *Om*.

The Mait. Up. equates *Brahman* in a three-fold manner to many things and *Om* is spoken of as the three-fold sound-form. Furthermore *Om* is praised as “both the higher and lower *Brahman*. There is a whole section which describes *Om* in different ways connecting it to *Brahman*.⁵⁰ It seems to set the stage for the Māṇḍ Up. with so many suggestions. The Māṇḍ Up. for the first time in the *Upaniṣads* adds a syllableless half *mātrā* for *Om* which denotes the highest *Brahman*, the fourth stage of unity consciousness. It also makes many parallel connections in the universe and with the different descriptions of the ātman in its progressive stages to self realisation. The table below gives a summary of that.

<i>A</i>	<i>jāgrat</i>	<i>viśva</i>	<i>virā</i>
<i>U</i>	<i>svapna</i>	<i>taijasa</i>	<i>Hiraṇyagarbha</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>suṣupti</i>	<i>prājña</i>	<i>Īśvara</i>
<i>Aum</i>	<i>turīya</i>	<i>ātman</i>	<i>Brahman</i>

We have now come to the end of the journey. We have seen how in the search for the first principle in their cosmological inquiries the *Upaniṣads* try out a number of possibilities, always ending up with a sense of frustration and non-fulfilment.⁵¹

The Taitt.Up. takes the plunge by postulating a first principle but stops short of defining it.⁵² That facilitated different speculations regarding the nature of the ultimate in which were posited many concrete and abstract entities. The Ultimate was even conceived in terms of the magical and the mystical.⁵³ It is all these many sided developments that have led to the remark “It is with the broken idols of this period... that in later times the temples of the Purāṇic mythology was adorned.”⁵⁴

Brahman comes to stay, at some point, in the search for ultimate principles in the Upaniṣads but the word itself never got defined and to this day the exact connotation is mystery. It is a prayer, it is an expanse, it is both an “objective prayer” and also stands for the “*subjective Brahman*,”⁵⁵ it is both an immanent and transcendent ultimate truth and in all its growth of ideas the “identity of the macrocosm with the microcosm”⁵⁶ was not forgotten and kept making its claim off and on. *Brahman* gets identified with *yajña*, *uktham*, *Om* and many other objects that engage the Upaniṣadic seer.⁵⁷ The final stroke is the identification of *ātman* with *Brahman* which probably was the culmination of the habit finding equivalences in the sphere of the microcosm with that of the macrocosm. The difficulty of finding the exact meaning of *ātman* also perhaps added to its mystical character and helped in identifying it with *Brahman*. The meaning of *ātman* as breath, wandering, blowing one’s self, etc.,⁵⁸ restricted to the ‘macro’ sphere and as *prāṇa* or breath it was easy to identify it with the ultimate life principle.

Raising the level of *udgītha* to high levels in the Chānd. Up. was probably a recognition of the potency of the chant which has made its presence felt at the same time. As something that upholds (*udgīta*) and in turn reveals, Om (Aum as spelt in the chānd, Up.) appears in this *Upaniṣad* as the most sacred sound. We have tried earlier to find reasons for the raising of Om to this level and the process by which it could have gained the status of the supreme mystical symbol identified with *Brahman*.

Is this the only way in which we can approach the question of Om! Is it possible to argue that Om is the result of the *sphoṭa* or *śabdabrahman* manifesting itself to the intuitive vision in the seen world as Om (a, u, m) to the ṛṣis? There could also be other solutions to the Om question. This paper has tried to examine available early *Upaniṣadic* texts with the hope of its throwing some light on the question on Om. We have thus seen that Om being a symbol amongst many other symbols traversed many routes and ended up in the supreme place of identification with the ultimate *Brahman*. Once that happened Om became the only *pratīka* for later Hinduism as well as its offshoots.⁵⁹ This then would immediately tell us why Om is the sole symbol that appealed to Hindus as the symbol to identify their religion with.

¹ *Bhagavadgītā*. 8.13.

² Akāro viṣṇur uddiṣṭa ukāras tu Maheśvaraḥ.
Makāreṇa smṛto Brahmā Praṇavena trayo matāḥ.

³ S. K. Belvelkar, R.D. Ranade, *History of Indian philosophy*, Volume Two (Poona: Bilvakunja Publishing House, 1927), p.2.

⁴ M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p.52.

⁵ a) *Rigveda*. X. 151.

b) M. Hiriyanna, op. Cit. P. 43.

⁶ a) *Rgveda*. I.90.6-8, V.52.10.

b) K. Sivaraman (Ed.) *Hindu spirituality*; New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989) p. 25.

⁷ Belvelkar, Ranade, op.cit. p.15.

⁸ *ibid*.

⁹ a) Sivaraman, op. cit. p. 23, 25.

¹⁰ *ibid*. p. 26.

¹¹ *ibid*. p. 31.

¹² Sivaraman, op.cit.p.31.

¹³ S. N. Das Gupta *Hindu Mysticism*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Reprint, 1983) p. 18.

¹⁴ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p.22.

¹⁵ *ibid*. P. 23.

¹⁶ *Rigveda*. 1. 146. 46; VIII. 58. 2; X. 129; X. 82; X. 121; X. 190; *Atharvaveda* X. 7.

¹⁷ M. Hiriyanna, op.cit. p. 33.

¹⁸ Belvelkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 39.

¹⁹ *ibid*.

²⁰ Each one of the *Upaniṣads* have examples of this elevating thought.

- ²¹ Belvaker, Ranade. op. cit.
- ²² *ibid.* p. 67. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. V. 3
- ²³ Belvalkar, Ranade. op. cit. p. 87.
- ²⁴ Hirianna, op. cit. p. 51.
- ²⁵ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 87.
- ²⁶ Hirianna, op. cit. p. 52.
- ²⁷ Belvaker, Ranade, op. cit. p. 135.
- ²⁸ Sivaraman, op. cit. p. 77.
- ²⁹ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 183.
- ³⁰ *ibid.* p. 328-29,
- ³¹ Hirianna, op. cit. p. 40.
- ³² Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. *pari passu*.
- ³³ *ibid.* p. 338.
- ³⁴ *ibid.* p. 342.
- ³⁵ *ibid.* p. 352.
- ³⁶ *ibid.* p. 67.
- ³⁷ *ibid.* p. 216.
- ³⁸ *ibid.* p. 354.
- ³⁹ *ibid.* p. 183.
- ⁴⁰ It seems these scholars go by a translation, not by the original. They don't think that the translation might be wrong. We have discussed this *vacana* from Chāndogya in our Om Book #1.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 216.
- ⁴² Br. Up. To be verified. ***
- ⁴³ *Taitt. Up.* 1.6.1
- ⁴⁴ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 255.
- ⁴⁵ *Kaṭh. Up.* 1. 2. 15, 16, 17. [This footnote and the numbering seems to be wrong. What we read in the text is *Muṇḍ. Up.* which appears below footnote no. 46. The text refers to as *Kaṭhapaniṣad* is missed. The reader is advised to read our book on Om].
- ⁴⁶ *Muṇḍ. Up.* II. 2. 4. [The placing of footnote here is uncalled for].
- ⁴⁷ A) Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 305.
b) *Śvet. Up.* I. 14.
- ⁴⁸ This no. does not exist in the text.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 318-322,
- ⁵⁰ *Mait. Up.* VI. 3, 4, 5.
- ⁵¹ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 347.
- ⁵² *Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante....*
- ⁵³ *Br. Up.* IV. 5. 15.
- ⁵⁴ Hirianna, op. cit. p. 40.
- ⁵⁵ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p.347.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 350.
- ⁵⁷ A) *ibid.* pp. 352-54.
b) *Śatpath Brāhmaṇa* X. IV. 1. 9.
c) *Taitt. Up.* 1. 8.1.
d) Sivaraman, op. cit. p. 70, 71.
- ⁵⁸ Belvalkar, Ranade, op. cit. p. 357.
- ⁵⁹ The religion of the Sikhs, for instance, raised Om to the level of its highest principle.

Ek omkar sat nām

Note: I am indebted to Ranade Belvalkar, for a number of references cited in my paper.

Ouseparampil

The History and Mystery of OM

Survey

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THE HISTORY AND MYSTERY
OF OM

OM¹ is the most important tri-syllabic symbol in Hindu tradition. There is no action, no prayer started and ended, without uttering Om.² The story of Om is as old as the Vedas.³ The Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and the Upanisads have their own philosophy on Om. Not only the Hindus but also the Buddhists, Jains and all the other religious sects—and in modern times Christians and even Muslims—give their own commentary on Om. So much is philosophized on Om that it has been regarded as the utmost limit of what can be uttered or heard. In a sense, therefore, it is better fitted than any other sound to express the bankruptcy of word and thought. What all thought and words fail to express Om succeeds in expressing. According to *Māndukyopaniṣad*, Om is the “seed-syllable” of the universe, the magic word *par-excellence*. Om is the primordial sound of timeless reality which vibrates within us from the beginningless past and which vibrates in us if we have developed the inner sense of perfect pacification of our mind. It is the transcendental sound of the inborn law of all things, the eternal rhythm of all that moves, the rhythm in which the law becomes the expression of perfect freedom.

Om is not the exclusive property of any particular school of thought; it expresses what is beyond words and forms and is beyond limitation and classification, definition and explanation. Om

1. Om is written as “OM” or “Om” or “AUM” or “Aum”. I generally use “Om”.

2. W.J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology* (Calcutta: 1975), P. 95

3. Om is sung by all the Vedas. Cf. 1 *Tai Up.* I. 8; *Manu.* II. 74.

is God in the form of *Sabda* (sound), which is the means and end of our realization⁴. Om is the positive name of God and *neti* "not thus" the negative; Om is the *Sunya* of Buddhism and the *Pūrṇa* (plenum) of Advaita. The "*Purnamadab*" ...etc. of Br. Up. 5.1. 1.; is the positive statement on Om, the "*Tatō vācō*" etc.⁵ of *Taittiriyaopanisad* (2.9) and the "*Vāo yasya*" etc. of *aparokṣānubhūti*⁶ are the negative statements on Om. "This short syllable contains a whole philosophy which many volumes would not suffice to state"⁷. However, here is a modest attempt to study Om in its different aspects.

Different Names of Om:

Om has three other important names: *Udgitha*, *Pranava*, and *Aksara*. The Chhāndogya Upanisad begins with an advice to do *Upāsana* of Om which is *Udgitha* (I. 1. 1.; I. 1. 7, 8). It is interesting to note that the Taittiriya Brahmana II. 11 interprets the *aksara* of Rgveda to mean *Omkāra*⁸. The word *pranava* is that which is roared, bellowed, sounded etc. The verb "*nu*" means to make a humming or droning sound, to utter the mystic syllable Om⁹. According to Taittiriya Sāmhita that which the *Udgatr* sings is *Udgitha*¹⁰. *Udgatr* is the priest of Sāmaveda. The *Amarakośa* identifies Om with *Pranava*¹¹.

O and Om

In the Vedic times *Pranava* had two forms: 1) *Sudha* 'O' *kārānta*, 2) *Makārānta*; that which ends in "O" and that which ends in "M". In the four *Sambitas* we do not see the Om written.¹² Om, as such, must have been used in the Yajurveda tradition at

4. Cf. M.P. Pandit, *Shining Harvest* (Madras), passim.

5. *Yatō Vācō nivartante aprāpys manasā saha, Tai. Up. II. 9.*

6. *Vācō yasyānīvartante tadvaktum kena sakyate, Aparokṣānubhūti, 107.*

7. Sir John Woodroffe, *Garland of Letters*, 1922, P. 214.

8. *Reṭh aksave parame, RV 1. 164. 39.*

9. Monier Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary*.

10. *Udgitha eve Udgātr (ṛ) nām. SV 3. 2. 9. 5.*

11. *Omkara pranava samau (Amara)*

12. Franklin Edgerton has interpreted two passages in AV to mean Om though the original text 'does not mention Om explicitly. "To you have mounted the *Usnika* (RV meter), the sacred syllable (Om), the sacrificial cry *Vasat*... (AV 13. 1. 15); upon whom rests the six wide (space), the five directions, the four seas, the three sounds (Om analysed — A.U.M.) of the sacrifice" (AV 13. 3. 6).

the performance of sacrifices. *Sudhōkāranta* is found in RV.¹³ Both are found in *Jaiminiyopanisad*.¹⁴ In the vedic tradition this book is called *Jaiminiyopanisadbrāhmana*.¹⁵ In the Sāmavedic singing we always hear “O” only. Om is found in Brāhmanas and Upanisads.¹⁶ According to L.A. Ravi Varma, “one cannot assert that the vedic ritualism did not use *bijaksaras* (seed-syllables). The *pranavam* or Om, and the terms such as *svāha*, *Svaahā* etc. should really be classed with *bijaksaras*; at any rate the *pranavam* cannot be any other than there. The meaning given to Vedic *pranava* and *Agamic bijaksaras* are both artificial and derived in the same manner. All *bijaksarās* end in *anunāsika* (m). It seems very likely that the *Agamic bijāksarās* were fashioned after the *pranava*, the most sacred and by all known accounts, the earliest *bijaksara*’.¹⁷

The Original Use and Meaning of OM

The term Om originally appears to have had only an affirmative sense. It is still used in that sense in certain religious and social ceremonies.¹⁸ But later, gradually, it acquired different meanings. As N.K. Venkateram Panthulm states, the value of *Aum* as an esoteric mystic symbol must have originated at a time later than the Samhita period and developed during the Upanisadic period and worked into a wonderful system of philosophic speculation from the point of view of *Jnāna* and on the basis of *Upāsana*

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13. *O hi vartante rathyena cakrā* (10. 117. 5c).
O srstir cidāthya sam etu (7. 40. 1a).
O cit sakhayam sakhyā vaurtyam (10. 10. 1c).
O te yante ye (1. 113. 11d; 1. 104. 2a; 8. 22. 1a).
14. *hum bha eva ityeta devopagitam* (3. 131-41).
O va iti dve aksare (3. 13. 4).
Tametadugata yajamanamityetenaksarente svarge loka dadhati (3. 13. 8).
15. V.P. Limave and Vadekar R.D. (Eds). *Eighteen Upanishads*, Poona, 1958,
16. *Omiti brahma/ Omiti idam sarvam/ Omityetedanukrti ha sma va avyo srāvayatyapraṭhanti/ Omiti Sāmāni gāyanti/ Om Omīti sastrani samsanti/ Omityadharyu pratigaram pratigrnāti/ Omīti brahma prasauti/ Omityagnihōtramanujānāti/ Brahmaivo. prāpnōti/ Tai. Ara. 7. 8. 9; Tai Up. 1. 8. 9; Omīti vai sāmā... Omīti manah... Omītindra/ Jai. Up. 1. 2.2 2; Omkāra sarvamapnoti, Go. Bra. 1. 9. 26. Cfr. idem 1. 9. 26. ff.*
17. L.A. Ravivarma. “Rituals in Worship”, *Cultural Heritage of India*, (Calcutta. Vol. IV), P. 445.
18. Ravivarma. *ibidem*, P. 446.

or meditation for realization through *Karma* and *Bhakti*.¹⁹ The syllable *Aum* was a syllable of invocation, as it still is during the Sacrifices.²⁰

Amarasimha gives it the following meaning: "*Omevam paramam mate*; "Om", "evam" "paramam", these three are used in the sense of approval. The *Avyayakośa* states that in the sense of calling, remembrance and showing of pity, "O" is used.²¹ The same dictionary explains Om: To show the beginnings, approval, permission, ending, Brahman, silent (prayer), Om is used as an indeclinable.²² "O" or "Om", similar to "ā" was a word of solemn affirmation or respectful assent, equal to that of "yes" or "Amen" or "Hail". "Om" first appears in Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads as a mystic monosyllable and is there set forth as the object profound religious meditation, the highest efficacy being attributed not only to the whole word but also to the three sounds *a, u, m*, which constitute it. The splitting of "om" into *a, u, m*, is a later addition.

Panini gives two rules regarding the use of Om in the beginning and at the end, respectively: "The vowel in Om is prolated (*pluta*) in the beginning of a sacred text, e.g. *O'm agnimile purohitam* (RV 1. 1. 1.). In work of a sacrificial nature, Om is substituted for the final vowel along with the consonant, if any, that may follow it in the sentence, e.g. *Devan jigati sumnayom* (Rv 3. 27. 1).²³

Another meaning attributed to Om is 'auspiciousness'. According to Smṛti, "*Atha*" and "*Om*" came through the mouth of Brahma first and, therefore, they are called *mangalarthaka* meaning auspiciousness.²⁴ We have a long discussion on this use

19. N.K. Venkatesam Panthulu, *The Mystic Significance of Pranava (AUM)*, PAIOC, Vol. IX, P. 177ff.

20. Ibidem, note, P. 179.

21. *Ahvānasmarananukambhādisvarthesu nipatoyam*/ cfr. Srisatyasankaracharya, *Avyayakosa*, MSES, Madras, 1971.

22. *Prarambhāṅgīkārānujñā abrahmatuṣṇībhāvādisvarthesu cātsu athyante*/ Cfr. also Chh. Up. 1. 1. 8.

When, in course of time, Om came to be—called *pranava* and different meanings were attributed to it, it is called an *Avyaya*, constituting of A, U, and M. cfr. *khilsa sutram*, 2. 9. 4; 4. 2. 9-11; 7. 7. 6., cfr. also, Visvabandhu Sastri, *Vedic Word Index*, V. V. R. I.

23. *Omabhyādāne* (8. 2. 87); *Pranavaṣṭeh* (8. 2. 89).

24. *Omkaracāthaṣabdasca dvāvetau Brāhmanh pura Kantrambhitvā viniryatau tena mangalikāvubhau* (Smṛti)

of *mangala* at the beginning of a work in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patanjali and also in *Brahma Sutrā* Bhasya of Sankarāchārya.²⁵ But it does not follow that all works should begin with “Om” or “atha”. There are examples of *Dharma Sūtras* and even *Srauta Sūtras* beginning without Om.²⁶ Generally Sacrifices, penance and prayers are started with “Om”. The Parabrahman is defined in three ways as “Om-Tat-Sat”. On the basis of this definition the Brahmins, the Vedas, and the sacrifices were originally created. Therefore the Brahnavadins start their sacrifices, charity and penance and all other scriptural actions after first uttering the word Om (*Gita* 17:23-24).

The Grammar of OM

Om has two grammatical explanations. The first explanation gives the derivation of Om as follows: There is the verbal root “av” which means to protect, to offer (as a hymn to the gods, to animate etc.). “Man” suffix is added to av; By the *Unadi Sutra* “Avatestilopasca” (I. 141), “man” becomes “m”. Then according to Panini’s rule 6-4-20 “av” becomes “a” plus “u”, and again by rule 6-1-87 “a” plus “u” becomes “o” Hence the word form is Om. The second grammatical explanation is that Om was originally composed of a, u, and m. Hence by the application of the Paniniyan rule stated above, the word-form “om” resulted. This splitting of Om into a, u, m is a more recent addition belonging to the post-Samhita period. In actual fact the above stated rules had no part in the derivation of Om: Om is underived.

We have so far examined the following: how Om was used in the beginning, its origin, lexical meaning, primary use, grammatical derivation down to the Upanisādic period. Now we shall turn our attention to the study of its various interpretations—philosophical, philological, psychological and sectarian.

Analysis and Interpretation of Om:

Māndukyaopanisad initiated the tradition pertaining to the sound elements of *Aum* as corresponding to and signifying the

25. *Mahābhāṣya*, 1. 1. 1; Br. Su. Bha. 1. 1. 1.

26. *Vedo dharamamūlam* (Gautama Dharmasūtra) *Yajnam vyākhyāsama* (Sam. Srautasūtram)

27. Cfr. Srisatyasaṅkarāchārya, *op. cit.*, “Om”:

Rāmabhdara Dikṣita, *Unadimanidipika*, University of Madras, 1972. I. 131; *Jvaradhvarasrinyanimavanupadhasca* (6. 4. 20). *Adguna* (6. 1. 87).

phases of the Self, conditioned by the three bodies of gross, subtle and causal, and as manifesting itself in the three phenomenal states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. The *Vārttika* elaborates the correspondence between the sound-elements and the planes of spirit corresponding to their manifestation. This theory rescues the syllable Om from the realm of the meaningless and the occult, invests it with supreme import and converts it into the highest vedantic truth.²⁸ Also *Tripurātāpani Upanisad* of Atharvaveda gives the philological analysis of Om²⁹. More attention was given to the build-up of the syllable when it was used in mantras. In *Aitareya Brahmana* and *Jai. Br.* (I. 136) we see Om split into *Aum*. Once the splitting of Om and assigning different meanings to each component had started, there was no end to such a process. In the sectarian traditions it underwent various divisions and gave numerous interpretations. Realities of macrocosm, microcosm, various psychic planes, meditation methods, yogic practices, Brahma-Atma relations practically everything was explained by Om.

"A" is the state of Atman which is called *Viśva*³⁰ in the isolated form but identical with the waking condition. The same "A" is *Visvānara* when all *Viśvas* are thought of cumulatively. It illuminates and relishes all the gross objects. It has links with the senses. All this mundane existence that is visualized in the waking state has its beginning in the portion "A" of Om. "A" is, therefore, the tutelary deity in which the whole world (*prapañca*) of waking state merges at the time of dissolution. Next follows "U". This is identical with *Taijasa*, that individual functioning portion of Atman who enjoys things in the dream state. Taken cumulatively, it is called *Hiranyagarbha*. The third portion is "M". This is identical with *prājña*, taken singly, and the same is called *Īśvara* collectively. This *prājña* is the active part of Atman who enjoys pleasure in sound sleep. He neither desires anything, nor does he dream. He is fully *Ananda*. He is *cetōmukha*. The collective form of *Prājña* or *Īśvara* is the cause of all. From him issues the whole world and in him, again, it dissolves at the time of destruction.³¹

28. Sankara, *Pañcikaranam*, (Calcutta: 1971). P. xix.

29. *Akāra ukāra makāra iti tenaikya sambhavati tadomiti*.

30. Consciousness in the waking state is called *Viśva*, dream state is *Taijasa* and deep sleep *Prājña*. *Turiya* is beyond all these states and is divested of ignorance. It is Atman.

31. Cfr. Belvakar and Ranade, *History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: 1974) P. 323.

Om, as identical with Atman, is one composite whole. It is then *Asvara* and *Aksara*. The same when tripartitioned into *A U* and *M* is identical with *Viśva*, *Tuijasa* and *Prājña* in singular capacity, respectively; and with *Visvānara*, *Hiranyagabha* and *Īśvara*—in that order—taken collectively. All *jivas* remain in either of these conditions—waking, dreaming or sleeping and enjoy various objects of pleasures. Even beyond these states there is the *turiya*, the fourth condition, which transcends the limits of all measures.³² This is Atman.

“*Om̐kara*” is written with a *nāda* and *bindu*, like a crescent and a dot over it. *Nāda* is the first going forth of power which gathers itself together as a great strength—as *bindu*, to create the universe, and this *bindu* as creating differentiates into the trinity, *A-U-M*. Hence *nāda* and *bindu* are the unmanifested form from which immediately follows all the animated life in the three conditions of waking, dreaming and deep-sleep. This *nādbindu* differentiates into the trinity of “cognition”, “volition”, and “action”; sun, moon and fire; the *A-U-M* are Brahma, Visnu and Rudra. These are all manifestations of one and the same power. These three aspects of *nāda-bindu* are operating all the time.³³

A-U-M and *nāda-bindu* correspond to the four stages of the expression of a word: *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama*, *Paśyanti* and *Para*, respectively.³⁴ All realities, all speech, all the states of consciousness are implicitly contained in the *nāda-bindu*, and when they are differentiated they are expressed in audible sound form as Om which in turn gets differentiated into *A-U-M*. The causal stress which produces the *dhvanis* (sounds) and the *varnas* (letters) are uncreated. It is the *anāhataśabda* (uninterrupted sound); it is Brahmā which is the cause of all that is pulsating. This *anāhataśabda* can be heard in some stages of yogic practices. Om is the only expression of the eternal sound. So it is the *mahabijamantra*.

Aitareya Brahmana (XXV) says “Prajapati created the three worlds—earth, space and heaven; these three in succession gave

32. Cfr. B.S. Agnihotri, “The Implication of Om in Philosophy”, J. O. I., Baroda, Vol. 14, No. 1, P. 70-74.

33. For a study of *Nāda*, *Bindu Kala* etc. in *Advaita and Sivāgama* vide, Gopinath Kaviraj, *Nāda, Bindu, and Kala*, J. G. J. R. I., Vol. III, Pt. “, Feb. 194-6, P. 97-108.

34. J. Ouseparampil, “Spirituality of Vāk in Indian Tradition”, *Jeevadhara*, No. 36, P. 497.

birth to Agni, Vāyu and Aditya, which in turn created Ṛk, Yajus, and Saman: these three Vedas created out of their essence the three *Vyābrtis-Bhub*, *Bhuvah* and *Svah*, which finally came to be represented by the three letters A, U, M (AUM). The sixth chapter of *Maitrayani Upanisad* mentions various triads of the forms of Brahman. The threefold Om is the sound-form; fire, wind and sun, the light-form; Brahma, Visnu and Rudra, the lordship-form; Ṛk, Yajus and Saman, the knowledge-form; earth, atmosphere and sky, the world-form; past, present and future, the time-form; breath, fire and sun, the heat-form; food, water and moon, the growth-form; intellect, mind and egoism, the intelligence-form; *Prāna*, *Apāna* and *Vyāna*, the breath-form. All these are praised and honoured in saying Om; Om is both higher and lower Brahman.³⁵

Ṛg Veda itself praises the Ṛks as the seat of the gods and as the source of every other reality.³⁶ The *Sākapurni Nirukta* explains how the whole reality was deduced from Om. From the first syllable came earth, fire, *Ṛgveda* and earthly beings; from the second atmosphere, air, *Yajurveda* and the inhabitants of the atmosphere; from the third syllable came sky, *Sāmaveda* and the heavenly beings. Therefore Om is the whole reality. Speech is the essence of man, since speech distinguishes him from animals. *Ṛcas* (hymns) are the essence of speech. *Sāman* are the essence of *Ṛcas*, since music represents the highest achievement of voice. Om is the essence of all *Sāmanas* (Chh. Up. 1. 1. 2). This Om is the name and symbol of Brahman. "*Om itiBrahmā*" (Tai. Up. 1. 8; Ka. Up. 1. 2. 16). Again we have to deduce everything from that Om, everything is from Om and everything is penetrated through and through by Om; Om is everything (Chh. Up. 2. 23. 3; Mai. Up. 1).

In *visnupurāna* (II. 8) we read that Om is Visnu; Om is the substance of three vedas and the lord of speech.

The *bhakti* movements give an eightfold division of Om: A, U, M, *nāta*, *bind*, *kāla*, *kālātita* and *tatpara*. *Tatpara* is the highest state. From A came Brahmā, the *Jāmbavat*; U produced Upendra, the *Hiranyagarbha*; from M emerged Siva, the same as

35. Belvakar and Ranade, *Op. cit.* P. 218.

36. RV 1. 164. 39; AV 9. 10. 18; Tai. Brh. 3. 10. 9; 3. 10. 18; Tai Ār. 2. 11. 1; Nir. 13. 10.

Hanumant; from *bindu*, *Satyakāma*; from *tatpara* came Rama. “*Omkāropāsana*” is considered identical with the *upāsana* of Devi in *Tripurātāpani* Up. In it *Bālagāyatri* is *A*, *Sāvitrī* is *U*, *Sarasvatī* is represented by *M*. *Pranava* is *Paramjyoti* (transcendent light) in the form of a Devi. *Gāyatri*, *Sāvitrī* and *Sarasvatī*-mantras are equivalent to the *upāsans* of *pranava* or OM.

The division of Om when applied to Kṛṣṇa works out as follows: *A* generated Rama; *U* generated Pratyumna; *M* Anirudha and the *Turiya* is Kṛṣṇa in whom rested the whole world. The *mulaprakṛti* is Rukmini from whom the whole world came into being. *Asvara* and *Aksara* are Gopalas. His *svara* is the *plute*.³⁷ According to *Manusmṛti* (II, 74-76), the three letters-A, U, M,—constituting Om were milked out of the three Vedas by Prajapati and so they represent the quintessence of the *Trayi* (three original vedic canons). The *Man. Up.* (9.11) gives another meaning to A, U, M; *A* means *ādimativa* or *āpti*-attainment. *U* stands for *utkarsa* or exaltation, for it means *ubhayatva* i.e. intermediateness. *M* means *miti* or *apiti*, because it signifies measurement or destruction. The fourth *amātra* has nothing corresponding to it. So it must stand for Brahmā who has no symbol.

The first evolution which Om undergoes is *śabda*—word. So Om begets *ākāśa* whose characteristic mark is *śabda*. From *ākāśa* is born wind, which is the carrier of the word. From wind is born Agni, which has the characteristic of form. That which expresses the word and gives it a definite shape is Agni. From Agni is born water; *rasa* or taste is its special characteristic. *Prāna* is of the nature of water and only when there is *prāna* (breath) can a word be uttered. Water gives rise to earth. Sound is produced by the intermediary of earthly elements.³⁸

37. B.S. Agnihotri, *Op. Cit.*, P. 72.

38. B.S. Agnihotri, *ibidem*.

The following table shows the evolution of everything from Om:

<i>Lokās</i>	<i>Tattvas</i>	<i>Avasthas</i>	<i>Purusas</i>	<i>Kosas</i>
<i>bhuh</i>	<i>prthvi</i>	<i>sthula</i>	waking	<i>annamaya</i>
<i>bhuvah</i>	<i>apa</i>	<i>sukṣma</i>	dreaming	<i>prānamaya</i>
<i>svah</i>	<i>agni</i>			<i>manomaya</i>
<i>maha</i>	<i>vāyu</i>			<i>vjnānamaya</i>
<i>janah</i>	<i>ākāsa</i>	<i>kārana</i>	deep sleep	<i>ānandamaya</i>
<i>tapah</i>	<i>ahamkāra</i>	<i>jiva</i> or	<i>turiya</i>	
<i>satya</i>	<i>mahat</i> or	<i>purusa</i>	<i>turiyāttia</i>	
	<i>ādi</i>	Hiranya garbha or Brahma ³⁹		

According to Hindu scriptures, there exist six planes above the earth (*bhuh*). They are known as *bhuvah*, *svah*, *mahab*, *janah*, *tapah* and *satya*. *Bhuvah* (inter-space) is the intermediary world between the earth and *svah* or heaven. *Xanah*, *tapah* and *satya* from the *Brahmaloka*. *Mahab* is located between *Brahmaloka* and the plane of *svah*⁴⁰.

It is important to note that all these analyses of Om into its philological, psychological, cosmological and phonological components thus follows immediately are attempts to show that Om comprises everything: God, world and man i.e. every reality takes its origin from Om. The above chart clearly shows the all pervasiveness of Om as it is conceived by Hindu thinkers.

The Phonology of OM

The Philological break-up of the sound into A, U, M, as the first, middle and the last of the scheme of sounds, gave a new significance to *pranava*, standing in the language of philosophy for the ultimate *Brahmā* who embodies in himself all that exists in the universe⁴¹, "A" is a guttural sound produced by the root of the mouth. "U" is a vowel produced by keeping the mouth open and keeping the tongue straight. "M" is produced by bringing the lips together. Hence it is argued that Om represents all the sounds which can be produced by the human mouth. So Om is all

39. Sankara, *Pancikaranam* with Sureśvara's Comm. (Calcutta: 1977) Narayanaswami Ayer. K., *The Thirty-two Vidyas* (Adayar: 1975). P. 22.

40. Cfr. Swāmy Nikhilānda, *The Upanishads* (New York: 1949, Vol. 1). P. 274.

41. Venkatesam Panthulu, *Op. Cit.* note, P. 179.

the possible sounds. The Almighty in the beginning produced this first sound by which the universe of atoms started the vibration. This vibration is ever present and the yogis hear it⁴². To quote from Joseph Campbell:

“The A is announced with open throat; the U carries the sound forward and M then somewhat nasalized, brings all to a close at the lips. So pronounced the utterance would have filled the whole mouth with sound and so have contained (as they say) all the vowels. Moreover, since consonants are regarded in this thinking as interruptions of vowel sounds, the seeds of all words will have been contained in this enunciation of AUM, and in these, the seed-sounds of all things. Thus words, they say, are but fragments or particles of Aum⁴³.

Om contains all the *nādās* (sounds) that can vibrate in all the worlds (Hamsa Up.). Swamy Abhishiktananda shares his meditation with us on this point:

Since Om contains all that man can say of God, it was right that all Vedic chants should end with Om, it was equally fitting that they should begin with Om, since Om is the first sound that comes to man's lips when he returns from the silence in which he has heard the mystery and tries to express it for the benefit of his brothers as he gives praise to the glory of the Lord⁴⁴.

After having discussed at length the analysis of Om we shall now turn our attention to the philosophical treatment of Om in relation to Brahman.

OM and Brahman:

Out of the ten principal Upanisads *Iśavasya* does not discuss the word *AUM*. *Kena* and *Aitareya* refuse to accept the identity of the word with Brahman. The remaining seven Upanisads state the identity and difference between “word” and Brahman. Here

42. Swamy Abhēdānanda, *Yoga, Theory and Practice* (Calcutta: 1967), Pp. 82-87.

43. Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image* (Princeton: Uni. Press, 1974), P. 361.

44. Swamy Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), P. 182.

word means any phonetic form which can represent the state of Brahman. *Sabdabrahman* is mentioned in the minor Upanishads such as *Maitrayani* (7.22), *Tripurātapani* (5-17), *Brahmabindu* (4-16), *Yogaśikha* (3.2) etc. These Upanishads hold that in so far as all the other words fail to express Brahman Om succeeds.

Brahman has no image. He cannot be known from above or below or from any direction; He is described only by one word or symbol, Om. The *Chāndogya Upanishad* begins with the advice that one must do the *upāsana* of Om. Om is given a mystic meaning by which the vedic seers wanted to solve the riddle of the world. In *Katha Upanishad* Naciketa is told by Yama that this Om is the best and the highest of all the supports. By knowing this Om one attains glory in *Brahmaloka* (kingdom of God).

But Brahman has two forms: "Word-form" and "non-word-form". The non-word form is revealed only through word form. Om is the word. By meditating upon Om and by basing oneself upon Om one attains absorption in the non-word. This non-word is perfect bliss and immortality. This is the mystic sound which the spiritual aspirants hear. By transcending the word man becomes indistinguishable like flower-juice in the honey. At the end of the word Brahman is the supreme. Soundless-Brahman; and he who worships these two, "word-Brahman" and "non-word-Brahman" attains final liberation (Mai. Up. 2. 22-13). In chh. Up. Om is higher than the high and greater than the great. In Br. Up. Om is as pervasive in power as Brahman (3.3.8,9). Sankara holds that Om is the common subject of all the Vedas. According to Sureśvara 'AUM' is the essence of all the Vedas and it reveals the highest truth.⁴⁵

OM in prayer and Meditation:

We have already discussed the use of Om as benedictory and affirmative syllable, and also as *Udgita* and *Brahma-Atma-relation*. Now we shall examine Om as a *yantra* and *tantra* for meditation. Here the sonoric and hypnotic effect of Om also must have been made use of.

The spiritual master describes Om as the symbol for meditation. It is the supreme means as well as the goal of meditation. Om is the most prominent symbol under which the *upāsana* of

45. *Pancikaranam*

the supra sensible Brahman is to be carried out. The *sanyāsi* is expected to meditate on Om even by leaving out the whole of the Vedas. Om is more expressive of Brahman than the Vedas, which are limited. Om is, as we have already seen, the root of the tree of the Vedas.⁴⁶

Tagore writes thus of Om:

Om, that means completeness; it is really the symbolical word meaning the infinite, the Perfect, the Eternal. The very sound is complete, representing the wholeness of all things. All our meditations begin with Om, and end with Om. It is used so that the mind may be filled with the sense of the infinite completeness and emancipated from the world of narrow selfishness.⁴⁷

The first *prapātaka* of the Chh. Up. identifies Saman with Om. Om typifies the very essence of spiritual realization. It is the source of internal and external life and also of fearlessness and immortality. Meditating on Om one attains fearlessness and immortality. Even a dog that would sing Udgitha will attain all its desires! The sun goes round the earth singing Udgitha. Om which was used in the beginning of all the sacrificial endeavours should have also had some mystical connotations. Om ties together the pearls of existence. If Om were not immanent from the very beginning to the very end world would be just a chaos (Chh. Up. 1.1.1, 11).

In the ten principal Upanisads we see Om under three heads: 1) As prefix, ending, and assent—29 times. 2) As Udgitha, Sun, world, Brahman—28 times. 3) As the essence of the Vedas, Meditation, elements of Om, analogy, satrie—18 times. Altogether Om is used 75 times.⁴⁸ *Katha*, *Svetasvatara*, *Mundaka* and *Praśna Upanisads* deal with Om as an object of meditation. We shall first consider *Mundaka* II. 2-6. The Upanisad already dealt with the temporal happiness which people attain through Yogas and

46. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Poona: BORI) Vol. Pt 2, P. 957.

47. Tagore, *Personality*, (London: MacMillan & Co. 1970), P. 152.

48. Gadbre Pramod B. "The Origin of Mystic Syllable Om", address delivered at the XXXIX Congress, International des Orientalistes, Sorbonne Uni. Paris; This excellent study I made use of more in the next section, not because I agree with his view but because it is worth our consideration.

other means, but now exhorts to know Brahman and be dissolved in him. This "being-one-with-Brahman" is the "Immortality" or "Eternal Liberation". In order to know Brahman one should meditate. How? The aspirant should concentrate his mind on the oneness of Brahman and the Self through the help of Om.

The *Katha Up.* praises and extols the great importance of the seer and the *guru*. What can a *guru* do so exceptionally? He teaches us to contemplate on the mystic syllable Om. For this Om is Brahman itself. Do not the Vedas throughout expatiate on the significance of this symbol? Are not all penances directed Om-Ward? Is it not on account of realising its full significance that people lead a mystic life and is it not the best support of spiritual thought? (I.ii.15-17). The *Mundaka* (II. 2-4) advocates the help of Om to reach Reality.

Verily is the Pranaya or the Om like the bow and the soul is like an arrow, which is discharged at the target of Brahman, by the undistracted efforts of the disciple, so that the arrow finally becomes one with the target.

According to the *Mait. Up.* the syllable is hidden in the secret place of the heart. It is the only enlightener of man. "Therefore" the text continues, "one should worship Brahman continuously with OM, just like the inspired sacred words of R̥gveda which are to praise and strengthen the divine powers."⁴⁹

The *Sve. Up.* I. 12-14 speaks of meditation on Om, using the simile of friction sticks. The above meditation used a bow and arrow as a simile. The following verse speaks of Om as the symbol of Atman. The yogi communes with Atman through Om. The method is the repetition of the word and the meditation on its meaning (vide Yoga sutra I.27,27). This form of meditation is explained by the friction of two pieces of wood. According to the interpretation of Nikhilananda Swamy,

The visible form of fire, while it lies latent in its source (the fire wood), is not perceived; yet there is no destruction of its subtle form. That very fire can be brought out again by means of (persistent) rubbing of the wood, its source. In like manner, Atman, which exists in two states, like fire, can be grasped in this very body by means of Om.⁵⁰

49. J. Gond, *The Visions of the Vedic Poets*, (The Hague: 1963), P. 283, 4.

50. Nikhilananda Swamy, *Op. Cit.* Vol. I, P. 84, His translation also is consulted here.

The Atman is present in the body; but due to ignorance we do not see it. Atman is revealed by rubbing away the ignorance by Om. The word friction is symbolic of meditation. By meditating on Om constantly, the Atman becomes manifest as by friction the fire becomes manifest. "By making the body the lower piece of wood and Om the upper piece, and through the practice of the friction of meditation, one perceives the luminous Self, hidden like the fire in the wood" (Yoga Sutra I.14).

In all the religious practices for realization, we see that the procedure is from the concrete to the spiritual, from gross to the subtle. Om has two forms as we have already seen: *Aksara* and *Asvara*—"sound-form" and "non-sound-form". The meditation must proceed from the sound to non-sound i.e., to the silence. One goes from the physicality of the sound to the spirituality of it. Brahman is hidden in Om. Through the sounding of Om one must reach the non-sound-Brahman hidden in it. Meditating on each constituent of Om and advancing one must reach the *turiya* and *turiyatita* state and find his dissolution in Brahman. As Om ends up in the serenity of silence, man by meditating on Om must end in the unconditional effulgence of pure transcendent Self. Om is the model of our cosmos and Self. Om represents the Impersonal Absolute as well as the personal aspect of God. Om is the undifferentiated word which has produced all the manifestations. Hence, from the manifested sound of Om or the personal aspect of Om one should reach the unmanifested or Impersonal God.⁵¹ In the words of Campbell,

The inconceivable sphere of undifferentiated consciousness, experienced not as extinction but as light unmitigated, is the reference of the fourth element of *Aum*: the silence that is before, after and within and around the sounding syllable. It is silent because words which do not reach it, refer only to the names, forms and relationships of objects either of day-light world or of dream.⁵²

Om is the *Sabdabrahman*. He who knows well *Sabdabrahman* reaches the *Parabrahman*.

51. Ruegg, D.S., *Contributions A L' Historie De La Philosophie Linguistique Indienne*, (Paris: 1959), Pp. 118-9.

52. Joseph, Campbell, *Op. Cit.* P. 362.

Om Meditation in Tantra:

Indian philosophy and religion generally give more importance to things like spiritual, subtle, and impersonal transcendent. The tantric school starts with the sense and proceeds to the soul. By proper handling of the senses the highest Atman or Brahman can be achieved. It gives more importance to the ritualization of our senses and the gratification of these for attaining the spiritual goal. The utterance of Om in meditation has a psychological and physical effect. One can achieve assimilation of Om and its connotations by reciting it and meditating on it.

The entire body may be spiritually activated through the articulate or inarticulate utterances of mantras (meaningful formulae in the form of syllables). The mystic resonance of the body is known as the *nāda* (mystic sound). This mystic sound is not produced by the friction of tangible substances. This sound is produced without friction (*anāhata*). A *sādhaka* may hear this sound very clearly. *Nāda* is intermediate between consciousness and produced words. It is more subtle than spoken words, but more gross than consciousness. Once a *sādhaka* becomes aware of the meanings of the *mantras* he may produce the desired effect in the empirical reality at will. Finally, when he becomes aware of *Sabdabrahman* (reality as sound) as the supreme source of the universe he may hear the resonance of Om (the name of Isvara) within himself. During that state there is perfect concord between sound (*śakti*) and meaning (*Siva*).⁵³ The hearing of the *anāhataśabda* is described in the following state of *tantrayoga*: "The sound AUM, then is not made by the things striking together, but floating, as it were, in a setting of silence, is the seed-sound of creation, heard, when the rising kundalini reaches the level of the heart⁵⁴.

In spiritual life, especially in meditation, Om is a *yantra*, a *tantra* and *mantra*. *Yantra* is that which represents something or symbolizes some reality in any shape to help concentration. The ideographic form of Om is used as a *yantra*. The section which follows is devoted to the consideration of Om in its present form as a *yantra*. *Tantra* is that which is performed during the meditation. Om is recited during the meditation time to bring about a

53. Cfr. Dr. A.K. Sinha, "Mysticism In Tantra", *Bhavata Manisha*, (Vārāṇasī: 1976, Vol. I, No. 3), P. 15ff.

54. Joseph, Campbell, *Op. Cit.* Pp. 362-3.

psychophysical unity and assimilation of the self to the Self. *Mantra*, as already stated above, is a meaningful formula in the form of a syllable.

The Ideographic and Phonographic form of Om:

Om is an ideograph, a symbol and a phonograph. When nobody is certain about something many opinions are likely to arise. Om also is not an exception to this rule. In the following passage Joseph Campbell gives a description of the present form of Om:

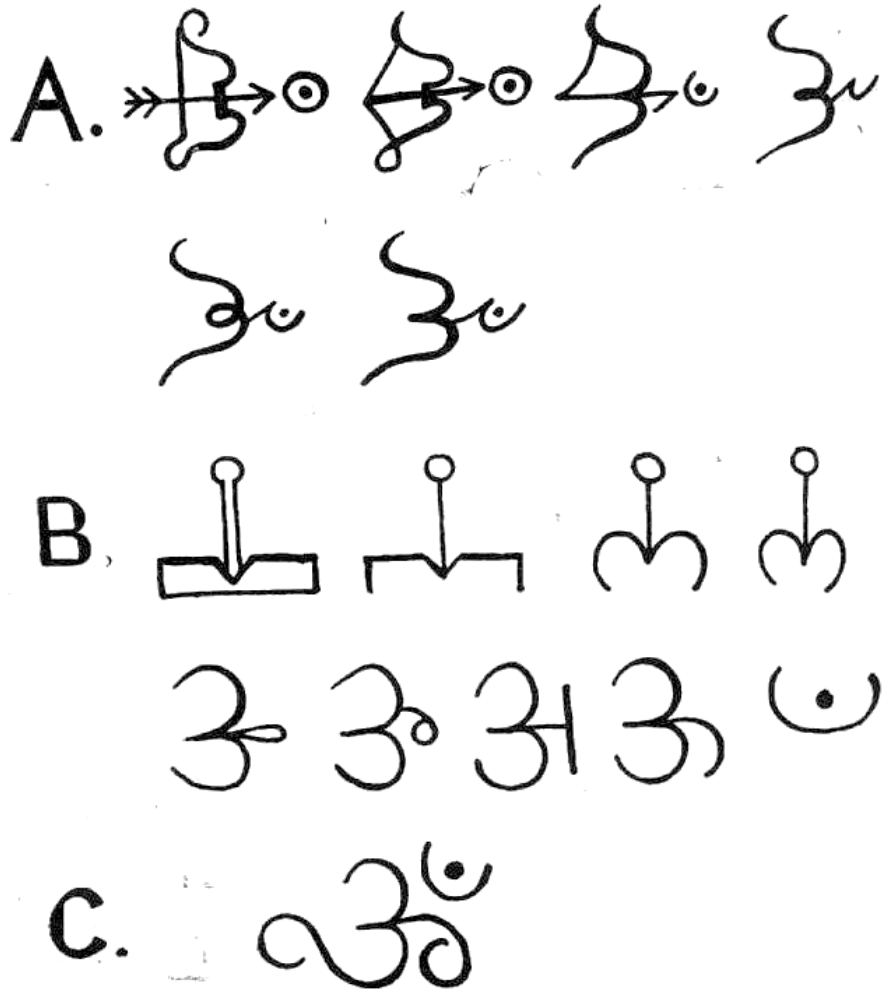
From the mouth of a double-headed mythological water-monster called a *makara* the flaming aureole issues by which the dancer is enclosed; and the posture of his head, arms and lifted leg within this frame suggests the sign of the symbol Om.⁵⁵

Dr. Pramod B. Gadre has made an attempt to account for the ideographic as well as phonetic form. His attempt is based on two hypotheses: 1) The Upanisadic simile of Atman-Brahman relationship. The abstract idea and the psychic experience is presented in graphic symbol when it cannot have a phonetic expression. 2) The syllabic and symbolic forms of Om, though designed to serve identical purposes, are two separate innovations. Dr. Gadre tries to argue that the development of Om has a pictorial thought background and the philosophic similes of Atman-Brahman relation would provide the clue to its understanding.⁵⁶ It is true that Om was used as an object of meditation in some of the principal Upanishads—*Katha*, *Svetāśvatara* of black Yajurveda *Praśna* and *Mundaka* of Atharvaveda tradition. The *Svetāśvatara* and *Mundaka* try to explain the meaning of Om through analogies whereas *Praśna* and *Mandukya* endeavour to explain the syllabic components of Om. These facts are more important, for the object of the similes is to explain the use of Om in the course of meditation. The Upanisadic references hint at its origin, according to Dr. Gadre. Hence, we have two possibilities: 1) Om was innovated during the formative period of these Upanishads. 2) During the Aranyaka phase Om evolved as an “aid” among certain esoteric groups when such contemplative practices and symbolizations were gradually substituted for elaborate rituals.

⁵⁵. *Op. Cit.* P. 359.

⁵⁶. *Op. Cit.* Pp. 1-20.

We have already shown above the use of pictographs of friction of sticks and bow and arrow in aiding meditation (Sve. I.14; Mun. II.3,4.). Dr. Gadre holds that the pictorial presentation of these must have given the ideographic form of Om. The following graphs show the various stages of development the bow and arrow and the friction stick underwent artistically.



“A” series depict Om through the symbol of bow and arrow as indicated in the *Mundaka* Upanishad. “B” series present the ideograph of Om by the symbol of the friction-stick as mentioned in *Svethasvetara* Upanishad. In the hands of the artists both have undergone many modifications according to the rule of progress “from complexity to simplicity”. “C” stage exhibits the most

common and perfect pattern of Om. The pictures show the gradual change in details and perfections. Bow and arrow was the most powerful weapon of the Aryans. The fire sticks were used to make fire. Hence, these two analogies are from the very culture of the people. *Dharani* was used for meditation to retain the image in the mind. Om was a *Dhāri*. So it is referred to as *tāraka tarakam*, *tāram dhruvam* etc. In the Aranyaka period, the analogies were replaced by ideographs. Ideograph and chant both serve as aids to meditation in producing a harmony between the physiological and psychological aspects. Atman-Brahman relationship was considered as the theme of both the chant and ideograph.

These arguments have their own weakness too. Om can be pictographed in a more simplified manner from the phonographic forms. In Devanagari script “o” is written with a crescent and a dot above long “A”. It is the same as is found in the present form of Om. Even if we consider “A” and “U” in their present form the phonograph comes much closer to the pictograph. Therefore, the complicated “shape-change theory” of Dr. Gadbre can be questioned. Friction-sticks, if used, are used one over the other never one by the side of the other.

Has Om undergone Sound-change?

An attempt is made by Dr. Gadbre to derive the sound Om in its present form. It is thought of as part of the Upanisadic meditation, to show the Atman-Brahman unity “Sah aham”. According to Panini’s rule⁵⁷ it becomes “so aham”. Again according to another rule of Panini⁵⁸ the form must be “soham”. When this “Soham” is repeated many times in prayer it first becomes “som” and then Om.

This explanation is a highly imaginative attempt to explain the fact. First of all, as we have seen, “Om” as such was the original form in use; hence an advaitic concept expressed in a sentence need not be condensed as Om. This theory presupposes an already well-developed advaitic concept and form of meditation. But Om is much older than the present Advaita.

57. *Ato ro raplutādaplute* (6. 1. 133).

58. *Ena Padāntādati* (6. 1. 109).

Concept of "Hamsa":

The later Upanisads exalt Siva using the attribute "hamsa", which used to signify persons who are highly placed in spiritual merit and achievements. The spiritual merit is connected with one's identity with Siva or Brahmā. One must be able to say that "I am the Hamsa". Hamsa means goose or gander or swan or flamingo—an aquatic bird. It is a poetical and mythical bird.⁵⁹ It is argued that when "sa aham" is repeatedly uttered it becomes "Hamsa". Also, it is suggested that the shape of the bow and arrow appears to be like that of a flying bird. So this shape also is suggestive of "Hamsa".⁶⁰

Hamsa is a bird which is highly extolled in Indian classical poetry because it is supposed that this bird has so many extraordinary qualities. It can fly very high and far. It lives in pure water and it can separate milk from the water and Soma from the water if they are mixed. It is used to signify soul or spirit due to its immaculate white colour, and at times the Universal soul or the Supreme Spirit identified with Virāja, Nārāyana, Visnu, Siva, Kama and the Sun; the Universal and individual spirit. The spiritual preceptor is one who knows and has "*nityānityaviveka*", one who has the prudent, distinctive knowledge of the temporal and eternal. He is able to separate truth from falsehood just as the Hamsa is able to separate milk and Soma from the water. His thoughts are concerned with eternal and sublime truths like the Hamsa which always flies far and high. His life is chaste and pure like the pure white colour of the Hamsa. Therefore, a spiritual preceptor of high merit is called a Hamsa or Paramahamsa. It is not the shape of the flying bird and the similarity it has to the appearance of the bow and arrow which makes us identify the self with Hamsa; it is the qualities of the bird. So it does not seem reasonable that "sa-aham" must be repeated to get at the "hamsa" form.⁶¹ The Hamsa, Nādabindu and Pranava Upanisads describe the ideograph of Om in an advaitic sense.

59. Cfr. Ai. Ar. 2. 3. 8.

60. According to Sāyana "hamsa" is resolved into "Aham", "sa".

61. Cfr. Monier William. Sanskrit English Dictionary.

Conclusion:

Om was used as a word of assent and affirmation in Vedic times. In the Brāhmana, Aryanaka and the Upanisadic periods it became a mysterious subject and was studied by different groups and sects. It became an object of meditation: the ideograph became a yantra, the sound became a *mantra*, and both together became a tantra. It appears that there is no other word in the Hindu world which has given rise to such high philosophical, theological, ritualistic and sectarian interpretations.

OM in Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa



अथ श्रीमार्कण्डेयपुराणे योगधर्मे ओंकारवर्णनं नामैकोनचत्वारिंशोऽध्यायः ।

दत्तात्रेय उवाच ॥

एवं यो वर्तते योगी सम्यग्योगव्यवस्थितः

न स व्यावर्तितुं शक्यो जन्मान्तरशतैरपि ॥ १ ॥

दृष्ट्वा च परमात्मानं प्रत्यक्षं विष्ट्वरूपिणम् ॥

विष्ट्वपादशिरोग्रीवं विष्ट्वेशं विष्ट्वभावनम् ॥ २ ॥

तत्प्राप्तये महत्पुण्यमोमित्येकाक्षरं जपेत् ॥

तदेवाध्ययनम् तस्य स्वरूपं शृण्वतः परम् ॥ ३ ॥

अकारश्च तथोकारो मकारश्चाक्षरत्रयम् ॥

एतास्तिस्रः स्मृता मात्राः सात्त्वराजसतामसाः ॥ ४ ॥

निर्गुणा योगिगम्याऽन्या चार्धमात्रोर्ध्वसंस्थिता ॥

गान्धारीति च विज्ञेया गान्धारस्वरसंश्रया ॥ ५ ॥

पिपीलिकागतिस्पर्शा प्रयुक्ता मूर्ध्नि लक्ष्यते ॥

यथा प्रयुक्त ओङ्कारः प्रतिनिर्याति मूर्ध्नि ॥ ६ ॥

तथोङ्कारमयो योगी त्वक्षरे त्वक्षरो भवेत् ॥

*प्राणो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म वेध्यमनुत्तमम् ॥ ७ ॥

अप्रमत्तेन वेद्भ्यं शरवत्तन्मयो भवेत् ॥

ओमित्येतत् त्रयो वेदास्रयो लोकास्रयोऽग्नयः ॥ ८ ॥

विष्णुर्ब्रह्मा हरश्चैव ऋक्सामानि यजूषि च ॥

मात्राः सार्द्धाश्च तिस्रश्च विज्ञेयाः परमार्थतः ॥ ९ ॥

तत्र युक्तस्तु यो योगी स तल्लयमवाप्नुयात् ॥

अकारस्त्वथ भूर्लोक उकारश्चोच्यते भुवः ॥ १० ॥

सव्यञ्जनो मकारश्च स्वर्लोकः परिकल्प्यते ।

व्यक्ता तु प्रथमा मात्रा द्वितीयाऽव्यक्तसंज्ञिता ॥ ११ ॥

मात्रा तृतीया चिच्छक्तिरर्धमात्रा परं पदम् ।

अनेनैव क्रमेणैता विज्ञेया योगभूमयः ॥ १२ ॥

ओमित्युच्चारणात् सर्वं गृहीतं सदसद्भवेत् ।

ह्रस्वा तु प्रथमा मात्रा द्वितीया दैर्घ्यसंयुता ॥ १३ ॥

तृतीया च प्लुतार्धाख्या वचसः सा न गोचरा

इत्येतदक्षरं ब्रह्म परमोकारसंज्ञितम् ॥ १४ ॥

यस्तु वेद नरः सम्यक्तया ध्यायति वा पुनः ।

संसारचक्रमुत्सृज्य त्यक्त्रिविधबन्धनः ॥ १५ ॥

प्राप्नोति ब्रह्मणि लयं परमे परमात्मनि ।

आक्षीणकर्मबन्धश्च ज्ञात्वा मृत्युमरिष्टतः ॥ १६ ॥

उत्क्रान्तिकाले संस्मृत्य पुनर्योगित्वमृच्छति ।

तस्मादसिद्धयोगेन सिद्धयोगेन वा पुनः ॥ १७ ॥

ज्ञेयान्यरिष्टानि सदा येनोत्क्रान्तौ न सीदति ।

*Read Pranavo

इति श्रीमार्कण्डेयपुराणे योगधर्मे ओंकारवर्णनं नामैकोनचत्वारिंशोऽध्यायः ।

OM Yoga as Sādhana

The sacred syllable “OM”

The subject of Yogin meditation is “om” which designates Supreme Brahman and through *comprehension* of it and meditation on it one attains final absorption into Brahman 31. 14-16). The M.K.P. explains the *compre-hension*, meaning and efficiency of the sacred word “OM”¹ :-

A, U and M are the three instant (matras) “OM”. They are characterized by goodness, passion and ignorance respectively. The “ardhamatra” on the top of the syllable is devoid of quality it can be understood by the Yogins only.

The letter ‘A’ is designated as the bhūloka (the terrestrial world), the letter ‘U’ the bhuvarloka (the atmospheric world) and the letter ‘M’ along with its nasal mark, the ‘svarloka’ (the heaven). The first instant is discrete (vyakta) and short (hrasva), and the second the indiscrete (avyakta) and long (dirgha), and the third the intellectual faculty and prolated (pluta). The half instant is the highest abode and is beyond expression (39.10-14). It is called ‘gandhari’ as it is to be uttered in gandhari note. Being pronounced it reaches the head, and conveys the feeling of ants moving over the body.

¹ MKP chap. 39.

The syllable “OM” consists of three Vedas, three worlds, three fires and three deities viz. Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and the Yogin absorbed in it obtains extinction therein (39. 8cd. 9).

It is declared that the Yogin engrossed in meditation on “OM” becomes united with Supreme Brahma. Breath is his bow, the soul is his arrow, and the Supreme Brahma is his target. It is to be pierced by the heedful man; he then becomes united with Brahman, as the arrow becomes embedded in the target. (39.4-8ab)

From a dissertation—Baroda—Nileshvari Desai.

Source: Nileshvari Y. Desai: Ancient Indian society, religion, and mythology as depicted in the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa; a critical study. Baroda: University of Baroda, 1968.



OM in Vāyu Purāṇa

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should then start from his house and walk to the east or to the north. With a pure mind he should sit in a level spot isolated and devoid of crowds. He should perform *Ācamana* and sit facing north or east. He should sit in the *Svastika* posture. After bowing down to Lord Śiva he should keep his body, head and neck straight.

36. His posture is comparable to a lamp in a windless place where it is steady (not flickering)¹. He should practise Yoga in a spot sloping to the east or north.

37. He shall perform *Dhāraṇā* in the vital breath, eyes, skin, ears, mind, intellect and chest. He shall take particular delight in keeping *Dhāraṇā* in the vital breath.

38. After realizing the advent of death and the groups (of ill omens) he shall perform Yoga-Dhāraṇās in the parts of the bodies twelve times.

39. He shall perform hundred or hundred and eight *Dhāraṇās* on the head. Without Dhāraṇās in the Yoga, the breath does not function properly (goes anywhere).

40. Then with a purity of mind, he should fill the body with *Om̐kāra*. Thus full of *Om̐kāra*, he does not perish. He becomes imperishable.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Characteristics of Attainment of Om̐kāra

Vāyu said :

1. Henceforth, I shall explain the characteristics of *Om̐kāra* and the ways of its attainment. It consists of three *Mātrās* inclusive of vowels and a consonant.

2. The first *Mātrā* is *Vaidyutī*; the second is *Tāmasī*. The third *Nirgunī*, which follows the syllable (?)

¹ Cf. *yathā dipo nivāstho neṅgate sopamā smṛtā/*

BG. VI. 19.

3. The *Mātrā* born of the Gāndhāra note, shall be known as Gandharvī. When employed on the head, its touch is like the touch of an ant.

4. The *Om̐kāra* so directed ceases to blow (sound) in the head. The Yogin so full of *Om̐kāra* becomes imperishable in the imperishable Being.

5. The *Om̐kāra* is the bow. The *Ātman* is the arrow. Brahman is its target. It should be hit unerringly. Like the arrow, the *Ātman* shall be wholly absorbed in Brahman.¹

6. The single-syllabled *Om* is the Brahman hidden in the cavity of the heart. This *Om* is the set of the three Vedas, three worlds, three fires, three steps of Viṣṇu and the Ṛk, Sāman and Yajur *mantras*.

7. It should be known that in fact, it consists of four *Mātrās*. The Yogin who is in communion with these will attain the *sālokya* form of salvation.

8. The letter 'A' should be known as the phoneme (?) The letter 'U' is *svarita* (the circumflexed note between the high and the low). The letter 'M' is the prolated syllable. The three *Mātrās* thus termed shall be known.

9. The letter 'A' is Bhūrloka. The letter 'U' is Bhuvanloka. The letter 'M' with its consonant part is Svarloka.

10. The *Om̐kāra* is a set of three worlds. Its head is the heaven. It is the entire universe. It is the region of Brahmā.

11. The region of the *Mātrās* is Rudraloka but 'A' alone is the region of Śiva. He (the Yogin) worships that region by specific meditation.

12. Hence the devotee shall always take delight in meditation. He should worship the *Mātrā-less* syllable strenuously if he aspires for eternal region.

13. The first *Mātrā* is the short vowel; the second is long and the third is indicated as *pluta* (prolated).

14. These *Mātrās* shall be known precisely and in due order. They shall be retained as far as possible.

15. He who concentrates the sense-organs, mind and in-

1. Cf. *Muṇḍaka Up.* 2. 2. 4.

tellec in the *Ātman*, even if he bears only half a *Mātrā*, will attain the fruit.

16. He who worships with *Aśvamedha* every month for a hundred years, will not attain the benefit which accrues through a single *Mātrā*.

17. One can attain through a *Mātrā* that benefit which a man attains by drinking a drop of water from the tip of *Kuśa* grass, once in a month, for full hundred years.

18. One can attain through a *Mātrā* that benefit which accrues from *Iṣṭāpūrta*, from sacrifice or from truthful utterances or refraining from meat-diet.

19. One can obtain through one *Mātrā* the fruit which accrues to the warriors fighting for their master without turning away from the battlefield.

20. What one fully attains through one *Mātrā* cannot be attained through austere penance or through (performance of) sacrifices with plenty of gifts.

21. The half *Mātrā* there, which is known as prolated, shall be pursued by the Yogins who are householders.

22. This is specially the *Mātra* characterised by *Aiśvaryas* (supernormal powers). Thereby, the Yogins gain the eightfold super-power like *Aṇimā*. Hence he shall practise the Yoga thereof.

23. A Yogin who is thus in communion (with the soul) becomes pure. Having suppressed the sense-organs and conquered them, he can realize the *Ātman* and one who realizes his soul, gets everything (i.e. becomes omniscient).

24. The intelligent Yogin who engages (himself) in meditation, attains the knowledge of the *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and the *Upaniṣadic* lore through (his) Yogic knowledge.

25. Thus with all his elements (that constitute his body) dissolved, he becomes elementless. He then transmigrates to the eternal region whence there is no return.

26. After seeing it with divine sight he meditates on the four-armed, four-faced *Prakṛti* designated as *Viśvarūpā* (one manifested as the universe).

27. One goat (i.e. unborn individual soul) takes pleasure and sleeps (enjoys) with this female goat (i.e. the unborn Prakṛti) which is beautiful, and red, white, black in complexion (i.e. consisting of the *Rajas*, *Sattva* and *Tamas guṇas*) and procreates creatures in great numbers. But the other goat (liberated soul) abandons her after enjoying her.

27 (A). The wise attain immortality after realising the reality about the primordial Prakṛti of eight syllables, of sixteen hands and feet, of four faces, of three tufts, of a single horn, who is primordial, unborn and the creator of the universe after its own form. The Brāhmaṇas who know (realize) the *Om̐kāra* are never born again (i.e. get liberated from *Samsāra*).

28-29. He who understands properly and again meditates upon the imperishable supreme Brahman called *Om̐kāra* leaves off the cycle of worldly existence. He becomes liberated from all ties and bondages. Undoubtedly he attains the auspicious eternal region devoid of attributes. Thus I have described to you the way for the attainment and realization of *Om̐kāra*.

30. [Prose portion] Obeisance to the lord of the worlds who has grasped the idea and knowledge of the Kalpas, and whose worship is beneficial to you. Obeisance to the attributeless, eternal Brahman to whom the lord of Yogins is devoted. One should worship him who is extremely pure and unaffected like the lotus-leaf untouched by water. *Om̐kāra* is the holiest of holy things. Consisting of syllables short and prolated, it is holy and full of sanctifying things. One shall worship *Om̐kāra* devoid of sound, touch, colour, taste and smell. Obeisance to the lord of Prakṛti, obeisance to Yogīśvara by whom has been made the fierce firmament, the earth firm and the heaven extended, by whom Elysium has been created and Ether made—the two being the abode of Devas. He has universe as (his) form. He is incomparable with *Prāṇa* and *Apāna*. He is a sacrifice and constitutes all things. The sacrifice is Veda. Veda is obeisance. Obeisance is Rudra. Hail to Rudra. Obeisance to the lord of the chiefs of Yogins. This prayer for success should be performed in the evening, morning and midday. Rudra bestows the fruits of all desires.

30. [Verse] Just as a ripe fruit is separated from the stalk

when wind blows at it, so also sin is quelled by the obeisance to Rudra.

31. The obeisance to Rudra is decisively the bestower of the fruits of all pious rites, but so is not the case with the obeisance to other Devas. He who bows to other Devas does not attain the same benefit.

32. Hence a Yogin should worship the supreme lord after taking bath thrice a day. Brahman is extensive. Brahman is tenfold extensive.

33. The lord created everything at the opportune time with Omkāra all round. Viṣṇu was also created by him as well as obeisance.

34. Obeisance as well as Omkāra eulogise the lord. *Yajña* eulogises *Omkāra*; obeisance eulogises *Yajña*. Rudra eulogises prayer. Hence Rudra's region is auspicious.

35. These are the secrets of the ascetics in due order. He who understands meditation attains the highest region.

CHAPTER TWENTYONE

Review of Kalpas

Sūta said :

1. Among the sages refulgent like fire, who resided in the Naimiṣa forest, there was an intelligent sage, well versed in the Vedas and was called Sāvārṇi.

2. He was very eloquent. Standing ahead of them with humility he approached Vāyu the highly majestic god who frequented that place to render favour to the *Sattra*-worshippers, and asked him.

Sāvārṇi requested :

3. O all-pervading Lord! We wish to hear from you who are the observer of everything, the legends of the Purāṇa, which are on a par with the Vedas.

OM: THE SACRED SYLLABLE IN THE VEDA

Dermot Killingley

A full understanding of the Vedic texts (using the term 'Veda' in its broad sense, including the Upaniṣads) requires a knowledge of the Vedic outlook. Such knowledge is impossible to obtain fully today, when the texts still present philological problems, the history remains hard to reconstruct, and the ritual itself, on which the Veda says so much, can never become familiar. Even on the rare occasions when the elaborate Vedic rituals are performed, they lack the social and ideological ambience, and consequently the meaning, which they had in Vedic times. Those who still recite or chant the texts do so mainly for the purpose of private study (*svādhyāya*), not in a sacrificial situation; they can have little resemblance to the liturgical whizz-kids, dashing in their chariots in search of the wealthiest and most discerning patrons, of whom we get a glimpse in ŚBr 11, 6, 2.

That a full knowledge of the Vedic outlook is impossible should not worry us unduly, for the same is true of all ancient cultures. But the partial knowledge which is available is hard to obtain, even for the committed indologist, and harder still for anyone else who wants to understand this fascinating chapter in the history of India, of ideas, and of ritual. Those who have to rely on translations of the Veda and histories of religion may get a distorted view: hymns are often selected for their mythological, poetic or philosophical interest, leaving the ritual purpose of the myth-making, poetry or speculation unexplained; the Upaniṣads still too often appear as idealistic philosophy, and as the less interesting, as well as the less comprehensible, the more they show their ritualistic concerns; while the Brāhmaṇas are passed over in silence, as if they were a dark age intervening between the fresh, spontaneous dawn of religion which Müller saw in the hymns, and the esoteric wisdom which Deussen found in the Upaniṣads.¹

This essay attempts to trace the history of one item in the Vedic view of the universe which has its roots in ritual and extends into those speculative passages which seem, at first sight, to have forsaken ritual entirely. This also happens to be one of those items of Vedic culture which have survived, and even extended their use, to the present day. Some matters which may seem elementary to specialists will be explained in the course of the essay, which is intended to show how Vedic ideas can be made accessible to non-specialists.

The syllable *oṃ* is the most sacred sound in the whole Veda. It is the most frequently heard sound in Vedic ritual, and in the later ritual of Hinduism it has a place both in the daily private prayers of the brahmins and in temple worship. It stands for the whole Veda, rather as the *bismillah* ('In the name of God...') stands for the whole Qu'ran; it also stands for the three gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and for Brahman, the ultimate reality. Besides being used in both Vedic and post-Vedic ritual in Hinduism, it is used in Buddhism, as in the well-known formula *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*; it is familiar to Sikhs in one of their names for God, *ek onkār*, literally 'the one *oṃ*-sound'. Not only is the sound itself used in worship, but the special character with which it is written is painted on temples and sacred objects, and printed at the beginning of religious books; this way of using *oṃ* is clearly post-Vedic, since the Vedic culture did not use writing, but preserved its extensive literature through an extremely exact system of oral learning.

The syllable *oṃ* itself does not occur in the earliest layer of Vedic literature, the hymns or mantras; but the idea of the sacred syllable does. The phenomenon of language plays an important part in the Vedic view of the

world, from the hymns onwards. Speech itself is spoken of as a goddess, Vāc, and a hymn (RV 10, 125) describes her as the support of all the gods, and the source of creation. We can compare the Vedic idea of speech as a creative principle with the Word or Logos by which all things were made in the prologue of St. John's Gospel, and the idea of God's creation by speaking in the first chapter of Genesis. Both the biblical and the Vedic tradition believe that the word or speech, once it has been uttered, has an existence and a power of its own. In this way, a Vedic hymn can be treated as a thing: it can be offered in sacrifice, and can strengthen a god, just as an offering of food strengthens him. It is possible for a Vedic poet to say:

I have brought praise to you...O Night, like cows to a victor,² (RV 10, 127, 8)

or:

For you thrive on praise, Indra, you thrive on hymns.³ (RV 8, 14, 11)

Whereas in the biblical context the creative word is the word of God, in the Veda the word is spoken by the priests. Speech is an important part of Vedic ritual—for the early period it is also the only part we can know in detail. It is often mentioned that it took twelve years for a priest to learn to recite the Veda. Not only did this training equip him for his function, but the preservation of the Veda itself, in the absence of writing, depended on the exact repetition, down to the details of intonation, of the sacred utterances the pupil had heard from his teacher. His ability to recite the Veda became, increasingly as the literature grew, a measure of a brahmin's sanctity, and recitation of the Veda, even outside the sacrificial context, was a highly valued activity; it is to this that we owe the oral preservation of the Veda through many centuries when the ritual for which it was originally intended was almost entirely obsolete. Already in the hymns we find that the priest is the embodiment of Speech herself:

This Brahman-priest is the highest heaven of Speech.⁴ (RV 1, 164, 35d)

Moreover, the words of the Veda spoken by the priests are the prototypes of all words; this theory seems to be followed by the author of RV 10, 71. This hymn is addressed to a god, Bṛhaspati, whose name seems to mean 'Lord of the Ritual Word':

Bṛhaspati! The first beginning of speech (vāc)
Was when they set out assigning names.
The best they had, spotless,
Hidden in secret, was revealed by love.

Since, as though sifting grain with a sieve,
The wise ones made Speech with their minds,
So comrades recognize comradeship:
A good mark is set on their speech.

Through sacrifice, they followed the footprints of Speech;
They found her, entered into the Sages.
They brought her out, and distributed her diversely;
The seven chanters recite her together.⁵

(RV 10, 71, 1-3)

The people described in these three verses are the original users of speech; and because of the close association of speech with ritual, these original speakers are naturally priests. They discovered speech by assigning names to things (v. 1): discovered rather than invented it, because, as the last line of v. 1 shows, it existed already, though hidden.

Verse 2 speaks of them as making speech, however, because when we use language we are not only using words that already exist, but also making sentences that did not exist before. It is because these original speakers made speech well, that good priests, who often call each other 'comrades' (*sakhi*) in the Vedic hymns, can recognize other good priests by their skill in speech.

In v. 3, the Sages and the seven chanters are probably the same people again: the prototype priests are often referred to as the Seven Sages. The original users of speech found it through sacrifice, because it already existed in their memories in the form of the Veda; for, although there are many references in the hymns themselves to the art of making hymns, there are also hints of the later doctrine that the Veda is eternal. The third line of this verse may mean that the ordinary use of language is based on its ritual use (cf. *RV* 8, 101, 6d below).

The idea that language is hidden does not apply only to the time before the first priests discovered it. Language is still hidden in the sense that it is difficult to know fully; though ordinary people may be able to handle everyday language, the composition and recitation of hymns that can praise and strengthen the gods in sacrifice is a skill known only to a few, and the poets show the exclusive and mutually competitive spirit of a guild of craftsmen. The same hymn goes on:

Many a one, seeing, has not seen Speech;
 Many a one, hearing does not hear her.
 Yet to many another she has revealed herself,
 Like a well-dressed bride, willingly, to her husband.⁶ (*RV* 10, 71, 4)

The Vedic Āryans were aware of the peculiar nature of speech: its power to bring about results, and its applicability to all known things. For them, the most wonderful use of speech was its use in the sacrifice, where speech in its ritual form not only gains favours from the gods but strengthens and supports them, and makes them present to the participants. It is because the presence of the gods at the sacrifice, and the benefits it brings to them, depend on the words of the priests, that *RV* 10, 125, as already mentioned, claims that Speech carries the gods. Speech is a source of life, and is often associated and even identified with the cow, which is also a wonder-working source of life to the Āryans, whose whole economy was based on cattle. In this verse, the speaker is ostensibly the cow (Renou 1955: 10); but she is closely associated, if not identified, with speech:

A cow that finds words, that sets speech in motion,
 Attending with all insights—
 A goddess wandering from the gods—
 A false-minded mortal has taken me.⁷ (*RV* 8, 101, 16)

The 'cow' spoken of is clearly something that provides man with the insight (*dhī*) and language which enable him, among other things, to compose hymns. It is called a goddess and a cow because it is a source of life and wealth; but it has come into the possession of man. Since we ordinary users of language move in the profane world, not in the sacred world of the gods who always speak the truth, we sometimes use our power of language for telling falsehoods.

Even if the above interpretation is not correct, the verse does exemplify the way the Veda contrasts the sacred with the profane in terms of truth and falsehood. The world is in constant danger of attack from the realm of untruth (*asat*) (Brown 1941), and is defended from it by the gods and by the rit-

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ual, which is an embodiment of truth (*sat*). In the hymns, our ordinary world seems to be part of the realm of truth; but later, in the Brāhmaṇas, untruth is man's normal condition; it is only in the purified and consecrated condition which he acquires when he prepares for a sacrifice, that he is in a state of truth like the gods:

Man is profane in that he speaks untruth...The gods are truth, and man is untruth.
When he [a man preparing to perform a sacrifice] says 'I now go from untruth to truth',
he goes from men to the gods.⁸ (ŚBr 1, 1, 1, 1-4)

The fundamental Vedic opposition between truth and untruth finds expression in the way we speak; that speech, which belongs to the true realm of the gods and the ritual, should also be found in the untrue realm of man, is a paradox which the above Ṛgvedic verse resolves in mythological terms.

We have already seen speech associated with footsteps: 'through sacrifice, they followed the footprints of Speech' (ṚV 10, 71, 3a). The Sanskrit word *pada* 'step' is also the regular term for 'word'; we can think of speech as a path along which each word is a step. We must be aware of this double meaning when we hear of footsteps in the Veda in connection with speech. Footsteps and footprints are often associated with cattle; the footprints of cattle were important to the Vedic Āryans as a means of keeping track of their wealth. Footsteps are also associated with the three steps of Viṣṇu, the one exploit of this god which is mentioned in the hymns. With these three steps Viṣṇu supports the world; they are filled with honey, and his highest step is the source of honey, which like the cow is a giver of life. The three themes of the highest step of Viṣṇu, the cow, and language (represented by a secret name) are brought together in a hymn to Agni, which associates and even identifies Agni with many gods in turn:

The step of Viṣṇu which was placed the highest:
With it you guard the secret name of the cows.⁹ (ṚV 5, 3, 3cd)

Another verse associating speech with footsteps and the cow refers again to its first appearance, as did ṚV 10, 71 already quoted:

When the first dauns dauned,
The great Syllable was born in the footstep of the cow.¹⁰ (ṚV 3, 55, 1ab)

The word for 'syllable' here, *akṣara*, is the regular term for 'syllable' in Sanskrit grammar. Here it refers to the original syllable on which all speech is based, following the Vedic habit of tracing the many which we know in the profane world to the one source in the sacred world. The contrast between the one and the many is made clear in this verse:

The Syllable of the hymn, in the highest heaven where all the gods are seated:
What can he achieve with the hymns who does not know it?
Only those who know it are sitting together here.¹¹
(ṚV 1, 154, 39; repeated in ŚvetUp 4, 8 and elsewhere)

The one here is the heavenly syllable which is the source of all hymns, while the many are the hymns which people learn and recite in this world. There is a parallel contrast between the inner circle of knowers, 'sitting together here', and the ordinary priest who merely knows the hymns; those who merely know the many cannot achieve as much as those who know the one source. The same contrast between knowledge of texts and knowledge of the highest truth is found in the Upaniṣads (BṛhUp 4, 4, 21; ChUp 6, 1, 2-3; ChUp 7, 1, 3; MuUp 1, 1, 4-5).

The word *akṣara* is often translated 'imperishable' in contexts in which it

refers, as noun or adjective, to the cosmic source, and which, at first sight at least, have nothing to do with syllables. For instance, Hume (1931) translates *BṛhUp* 3, 8, 11:¹²

Verily, O Gārgī, that Imperishable is the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the understood Understander...Across this Imperishable, O Gārgī, is space woven, warp and woof.

and Edgerton (1952) translates *BhG* 8, 3a:¹³

Brahman is the supreme imperishable.

Even *BhG* 8, 11a, which could without incongruity be translated 'The syllable which Veda-knowers speak'¹⁴ is translated by Edgerton:

Which Veda-knowers call the imperishable.

In linguistic contexts, *akṣara* is regularly translated 'syllable' (or sometimes 'vowel' or 'letter', since the usage of the ancient Sanskrit linguists fluctuates). This gives the appearance of two words, one a philosophical term and the other a linguistic one, which happen to have the same form. But to separate the two meanings in this way is to obscure the way in which the Veda speaks of the one underlying the many not in philosophical terms as the Absolute, the First Cause, or the Unknowable, but in terms drawn from the ritual context in which the Veda grew, of which the language of ritual was an important part.

From its form, *akṣara* would mean 'unflowing' rather than 'imperishable' (negative prefix *a-* + root *kṣar* 'flow'); but 'not flowing away; inexhaustible' are, of course, possible as derivative meanings. This word is made the subject of the verb 'to flow' in *RV* 1, 164, 42, no doubt as a deliberate paradox:

The cow buffalo has lowed, building the waters.
One-footed, two-footed, four-footed,
Eight-footed, nine-footed she has become,
Thousand-syllabled in the highest heaven.

From her the rivers flow diversely;
Thereby the four directions live.
Thence flows the Unflowing;
On it everything lives.¹⁵

(*RV* 1, 164, 41-2)

Like the cow of *RV* 8, 101, 16, the cow buffalo is speech, which is manifested in utterances of varying length; its heavenly form contains infinite possibilities, a fact which was expressed in verse 39 (above) by calling it the one Syllable, but here by calling it thousand-syllabled. Because of the life-giving properties of both speech and cattle, she is also called the source of another giver of life: running water. The second verse presents a slight problem: *tena*, which I have translated 'thereby', is masculine or neuter singular, and cannot refer grammatically either to the cow buffalo or to the rivers; the cow buffalo seems to have been silently replaced by some unspecified source of life. The water on which everything lives is paradoxically described both as flowing from this unspecified source, and as unflowing.

Later texts contrast *akṣara*, the unchanging ground of the world, with *kṣara* 'the flowing', the world of change (*ŚvetUp* 1, 8; 1, 10; 5, 1; *BhG* 15, 16; 15, 18). Though the cosmological ideas of these texts are less clearly rooted in ritual than those of the hymns, Brāhmaṇas and early Upaniṣads, to appreciate their full resonance we should be aware that *akṣara* means 'syllable', just as in the earlier texts we should be aware that it also means

'unflowing'.

That a word whose transparent etymology yields the meaning 'unflowing' should mean 'syllable' reflects the Vedic priests' concern with language. The words of the hymns, and the insights which they express, are said to flow:

Insights, club-bearing Indra, flow, as a watery spring pours.¹⁶ (RV 8, 49 6)

This flow, however, is a manifestation in time of something which exists outside time: a temporal token of a timeless type, just as each performance of the sacrifice is a renewal of the primordial sacrifice; or, in more familiar terms, as every train which leaves Newcastle for London at 7.45 is *the* 7.45, so that we can say 'I took the same train last week', or 'This train is always full', even if the engine and coaches are different every time (cf. Saussure 1962: 151).

The speech which flows from the priests at the sacrifice, each syllable of which is audible only for a moment, would not be possible unless there were a source from which it flowed, itself inaudible and unflowing. Similarly, words are called unageing (*ajara-*) in the hymns (Renou 1955: 9). Speech thus provided a ready model for the notion that the phenomena of our experience are manifestations of a transcendent substance; this notion became very influential in the Upaniṣads. Another such model was provided by the sacrifice.

If we ask how the composers of the Veda could have thought in such abstract terms as type and token, manifestation and substance, the answer is that they did not, any more than does a person using a railway timetable; they thought about relations which we can translate for our own purposes into abstract terms, but they themselves used concrete terms familiar from their work. Nor did they think about these matters in the same way as we would. They did not think of speech as the manifestation of a highly complex abstract language system involving lexicon, grammar and so on; rather, speech arose out of the one Syllable. Further, not being aware of historical change in language, they thought of this syllable as eternal. Much later, the theory of language developed by the ritualists of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school was unable to see that a lexical word, which experience tells us always exists prior to the utterance in which it occurs, could ever have come into being for the first time, and concluded that words are eternal (Jha 1942: 103-8, 116f). It is for the same reason that the author of RV 10, 71, 1, quoted above, thought of speech as already existing, though hidden, when the first speakers began to use it.

The meaning 'imperishable', which modern translators, as we have seen, often give to *akṣara*, was in fact proposed very early, but in a manner which shows that it was not the meaning which a Sanskrit speaker would expect the word to have.

It is unflowing (*akṣarat*). Because it is unflowing it is *akṣara*. And because the *akṣara* did not perish, it was imperishable (*akṣaya*). Imperishable, indeed, is what it is called. It is called *akṣara* obscurely.¹⁷ (JaiUpBr 1, 24, 1-2)

'Obscurely' means that the meaning which the author attributes to *akṣara* is not expressed by it, but by another, slightly different, word, just as it is said that the god Indra is really *Indha* 'kindler', but called Indra obscurely (BrhUp 4, 2, 2; cf. ŚBr 3, 2, 1, 8; 6, 1, 1, 2). The word *vai* ('indeed') which occurs in both passages often indicates that we are faced not with a direct statement of identity but with a mental act of identification of two things which are ordinarily considered different. For the author of the Jaiminiya text, then, *akṣara* did not mean 'imperishable' in common language; he imputed this meaning to it by stating that it was a disguise for another word.

We have seen that the one Syllable (which also means 'the Unflowing') is the source of all speech. Since speech is essential to Vedic sacrifice, and the sacrifice is the basis of the world order, it is easy to think of the Syllable as the origin of the world: the one underlying the many, not just with reference to speech but to all things. This meaning comes to the fore in the later Upaniṣads and *BhG*, where the translation 'imperishable' becomes increasingly, though still not exclusively, appropriate.

The hymns do not identify the Syllable with any particular sound; perhaps they had none in mind, since it belonged with the gods, not with men. The passage quoted above goes on to report that some pronounce the syllable as *oṃ* and others as *o*; the author gives his preference to *oṃ* (*JaiUpBr* 1, 24, 3).

Later, the syllable is regularly identified as *oṃ*:

The word [or step] which all the Vedas mention,
Which all ascetic practices speak,
Desiring which, people lead the life of the Vedic disciple:
That word I will tell you in brief.
It is *oṃ*.

For this syllable alone is Brahman;
This syllable alone is the highest.
By knowing this syllable alone,
Whatever anyone desires is his.¹⁰

(*Katp* 2, 15-16)

The idea that the original syllable is *oṃ* is not a necessary part of the doctrine of the Syllable in the passages we have seen hitherto. But the absence of *oṃ* from the hymns does not necessarily mean that *oṃ* was unknown when the hymns were composed; the collections record only the hymns, and not their ritual context of which *oṃ* was a part.

Though traditional lexicography treats *oṃ* as a word derived from the root *av* 'to aid', it seems futile to seek an etymology for it, or attempt to give it a meaning otherwise than by showing the contexts in which it is used. It seems, indeed, to be not so much a word as a paralinguistic sound, a vocal gesture. Though written in roman script with two letters, it is pronounced as one uniform sound; the *ṃ* indicates that the vowel is nasal (except when a vowel follows in the same sentence, when the sandhi rules of Sanskrit require it to be pronounced with a final *m*; in such contexts it is written *om*). The simultaneous oral and nasal resonance gives it a distinctive, solemn sonority.

Among the Sāmavedic priests it is one of several paralinguistic sounds. These include the *stobha* ('insertion') *au-ho-vā*, inserted into Vedic verses when chanting (Howard 1977: 11). *Oṃ* itself, and another syllable *huṃ*, may be inserted respectively before and after the principal section (the *udgītha*)¹⁹ of a chant sequence (*stotriyā*). Another Sāmavedic practice is to substitute the vowel *o* for each syllable of the *udgītha*, so that only the rhythm of the verse is heard and the words themselves suppressed; this is known as *anirukta-gāna* 'unpronounced chanting' (Howard 1977: 23f; van Buitenen 1959: 180f). Superficially, one might say that the verse is not chanted at all, but only the tune; but this is not so, for the chanter is expected to recite the words mentally. The skills of the Sāmavedic priest thus included not only the singing of words but the pronunciation of sounds which were not words; *oṃ* may have appeared first in the ritual as one such sound. The early stages of speculation on *oṃ* are found especially in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads of the *Sāmaveda*, which suggests that such thinking originated in Sāmavedic circles.

Oṃ was also pronounced, perhaps originally in imitation of the Sāman

singers, by other participants in the Vedic ritual. It thus became the commonest sound heard at the ritual (van Buitenen 1959: 180). It played a part in the signalling system with which the priests co-ordinated their various roles. For instance, when the hotṛ pronounced the anuvākyā, a formula inviting a god, he pronounced it in a low voice but ended by pronouncing oṃ aloud (Renou 1954: 12), apparently to show that the adhvaryu could now carry on with the soma libation; the procedure recalls the Tridentine practice of muttering a prayer except for the last phrase, which is spoken aloud so that the congregation know what part of the mass has been reached. Again, the hotṛ ended the uktha, a part of his role at a soma sacrifice, with *uktham vāci* 'the uktha has been recited', to which the adhvaryu replies: *oṃ ukthasā* 'Oṃ, reciter of the uktha' (*AiBr* 3, 12, 2; *TaiSaṃ* 3, 2, 9, 1). Other syllables were used similarly: the signal given by the adhvaryu to the āgnīdhra (the kindler of the fire) to pronounce the formula *astu śraoṣat*, which in turn is the cue for the hotṛ to say *vaṣaṭ*, was *śrāvaya* ('make it heard'), *o śrāvaya*, *oṃ śrāvaya*, *ā śrāvaya*, or *om ā śrāvaya*; this formula is called the *āśrāvayaṇa* (Renou 1954: 31).

The frequency in the ritual of oṃ, and of similar syllables such as o, *śom*, leads the *TaiUp* to identify oṃ with Brahman—here perhaps the ritual as a whole, and the sacred power which it embodies—and with the universe:

Oṃ is Brahman; oṃ is this universe...saying o *śrāvaya* they pronounce the *āśrāvayaṇa*; saying oṃ they sing the chants; saying oṃ *śom* they recite the praises (*śastra*); saying oṃ the adhvaryu recites the response; saying oṃ the brahman-priest gives the signal to proceed (*prasava*); saying oṃ one gives permission for the fire-offering.²⁰ (*TaiUp* 1, 8)

Oṃ thus appears in the repertoire of each of the three classes of priest associated with the three Vedas:

By it this threefold knowledge proceeds: saying oṃ [the adhvaryu] pronounces the *āśrāvayaṇa*; saying oṃ [the hotṛ] recites the *śastra*; saying oṃ [the udgātṛ] chants the *udgītha*.²¹ (*ChUp* 1, 1, 9; cf. *ChUp* 1, 4, 4)

This explains the description of oṃ in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (*KaUp* 3, 15a above) as 'the word which all the Vedas mention'.

Its frequency in the ritual makes oṃ comparable to *Amen*; it is used similarly to signify assent to what has been said by another. However, whereas *Amen* has a clear etymological meaning in Hebrew, 'truly, certainly', but became fixed in a ritual context so that this context alone constitutes its meaning, oṃ seems to have had no etymology, to have belonged originally in its ritual context, and to have acquired from this context a meaning which was later elaborated in other contexts, as we shall see.

Its use in the cues given by one priest to another gave it the meaning of an authorization or permission for what followed:

This syllable is permission, for when one gives permission for anything he says just oṃ.²² (*ChUp* 1, 1, 8)

Outside the ritual itself, in Upaniṣadic dialogues which have the ritual as background, oṃ can have the related but different meaning of assent to a proposition, or an affirmative answer to a question:

'Just how many gods are there, Yājñavalkya?' 'Thirty-three.'

'Yes (oṃ)', he said.²³

(*BṛhUp* 3, 9, 1)

'Have you been instructed by your father?' 'Yes (oṃ)', he said.²⁴

(*BṛhUp* 6, 2, 1; cf. *BṛhUp* 5, 2, 1; 5, 2, 3)

But this use of *oṃ* to signify assent or affirmation implies some reference to ritual; other words for 'yes' are used in ordinary Sanskrit. Even in the ritual itself, when a verse (*gāthā*) from secular literature is used, the response is not *oṃ* but an ordinary word for 'yes', *tathā*:

'*Oṃ*' is the response to a ṛg-vedic verse; 'tathā' is the response to a *gāthā*. '*oṃ*' is divine; 'tathā' is human.²⁵ (*Aṭṭ* 7, 18)

Because it is used at the beginning of ritual utterances, the later Sanskrit tradition has given *oṃ* the meaning of an auspicious invocation (*maṅgalā*) (Ousepurampil 1977: 442f). The same meaning is similarly prescribed for the sentence-initial connective *atha*, which commonly marks the beginning of a new topic; in each case, the meaning has been deduced from the context.

The above quotation from *ChUp* 1, 1, 9 suggests an association of *oṃ* with the number three, the number of the three Vedas. *TaiUp* 1, 8, without mentioning the number three, associates *oṃ* both with the Veda and with the universe, which like the Veda can be a triad: earth, atmosphere and sky. These in turn are represented in the three words *bhūh*, *bhuvah*, *svah* (the three *vyāhṛtis*, 'utterances'), which are often recited together in the Vedic ritual and are frequently mentioned in the Vedic sūtras. They are pronounced at certain moments in the ritual, often by the *adhvaryu* or by the *brahman*, the supervisory priest, as part of a rite to expiate a mistake in the ritual (Renou 1954: 144). The three are often preceded by *oṃ*, a practice which survives in their use as a preliminary to the daily recitation of the *Sāvitrī* mantra (*ṚV* 3, 62, 10). The recitation of *oṃ*, the three *vyāhṛtis* and the *Sāvitrī* is enjoined in the *TaiĀr*, which adds that *oṃ* stands for the three Vedas, and identifies it with Speech and with the Syllable mentioned in *ṚV* 1, 164, 39 (*TaiĀr* 2, 11, 4-6). The series of *vyāhṛtis* is often expanded by adding further words: the *TaiUp* adds *mahah*, which it identifies with the self, the sun, the moon, *Brahman* (represented as a fourth Veda) and food; it is noteworthy that this addition is attributed to a named innovator, *Māhācamasya* (*TaiUp* 1, 5; cf. *MaiUp* 6, 6; van Buitenen 1962: 36). A series of seven *vyāhṛtis*, in which the last four correspond to worlds beyond the sky, has become standard:

oṃ bhūh bhuvah svar mahah janas tapah satyam. (*TaiĀr* 10, 28, 1; *MVĀrUp* 15, 3)

Other expansions of the series exist, such as

oṃ bhūh bhuvah svar janad vṛhat karad ruhan mahat tac chām om (*ChĀr* 2, 2, 14)

Besides the three Vedas, the triple world, and the three *vyāhṛtis*, there is a phonetic link with the number three. *Oṃ* is regularly pronounced in Vedic recitation as an extra-long (*pluca*) vowel, three times the length of a short vowel; it is therefore threefold because it occupies three units (*mātrā*) of time (*MaiUp* 6, 3).

But there is a further sense, not phonetic but phonological, in which *oṃ* is a threefold sound. According to the ancient Indian grammarians, the sound *o* is made up of two sounds, *a* and *u*, though it is phonetically a monophthong.²⁶ Further, the nasal resonance represented by *m* was also treated as a separate segment following the vowel, although it was pronounced simultaneously with it;²⁷ this theoretical treatment is justified by the fact that it was pronounced as a consonant *m* if a vowel followed, as noted above. Thus *oṃ* can be divided into three sounds, *a + u + m*; it is sometimes romanized as *auṃ* (contrary to the usual romanization in which *au* represents a diphthong) to indicate this. But this division into three segments is an abstraction belonging to phonological theory; phonetically, *oṃ* is a single sound, being a

continuous nasal vowel. Its phonological threefoldness and phonetic unity have no doubt contributed to its importance as a focus of meditation and speculation.

This threefold phonological analysis of om appears in one of the cosmogonic myths in the Brāhmaṇas (*AiBr* 5, 32). In this myth the triad of sounds making up om is linked to four other triads: earth, air and sky; the three cosmic powers associated with them, fire (*agnī*), wind (*vāyu*) and sun (*āditya*), which are also gods; the three Vedas; and the three vyāhṛtis. The myth relates that the creator-god Prajāpati, who is also the prototype of the father, and of the patron of sacrifice (*yajamāna*), desired to reproduce himself and become many; by means of heat he produced earth, atmosphere and sky. By a further process of heating (*abhi-tap*) he produced fire, wind and sun; by heating these, the three Vedas; by heating these, the three vyāhṛtis; and by heating these, the sounds a, u, m. The process of heating may be suggested by a hen sitting on eggs, and translators often use the verb 'brood' here and in similar passages; but the root *tap* suggests heat as manifested in the sacrifice and in asceticism, as well as in living beings. Finally, Prajāpati brought together the three sounds and made om, the final product of the creative act.

This myth, which is one of many accounts of the self-reproduction of Prajāpati, is elaborated in *Manu* 2, 74-6; *ChUp* 2, 23, 2-3 has a briefer version, which does not divide om into three. The threefold reproduction recurs in *ChUp* 6, 2, 3-4, where the original Being (*sat*) reproduced itself as heat, water and food, which, we may add, are located by Vedic thought in the sky (as the sun), atmosphere (as rain) and earth (as crops).

Another myth of the origin of om, through not using the threefold analysis into a + u + m, uses the same four other triads linking om with the cosmos and with ritual; this time the process is not one of heating but of squeezing out juice:

Prajāpati conquered the world with the triple Veda; so it was his conquest.

He thought: 'If the other gods sacrifice with this Veda, they will conquer this conquest of mine. Come, I will extract the juice of this triple Veda.'

Saying 'Bhūh', he extracted the juice of the Ṛg-Veda. It became this earth. The juice which flowed out of it—the juice of the juice—was Fire.

Saying 'Bhuvaḥ', he extracted the juice of the Yajur-Veda. It became this atmosphere. The juice which flowed out of it—the juice of the juice—was Wind.

Saying 'Svah', he extracted the juice of the Sāma-Veda. It became that sky. The juice which flowed out of it—the juice of the juice—was the Sun.

Now there was one syllable whose juice he could not extract, and that was om. It became Speech. She is called just om, and her juice is Breath itself.²⁸ (*JatK* 1, 1, 1-7)

In this myth Prajāpati extracts the three layers of the Vedic universe, and the three powers or gods associated with them, from the three Vedas by means of the three sacred words, and finds as their irreducible residue the sacred syllable which belongs to all three Vedas. This syllable is not created but eternal; it is hidden until it is found by Prajāpati, just as the sages found Speech in *ṛV* 10, 71, 1d above.

Another passage, again using the motif of heating, similarly links om with the triads of the Vedas and the vyāhṛtis, and also (by implication only, since the number three in this instance is not mentioned) with that of the worlds:

Prajāpati heated the worlds. From them, when heated, the threefold knowledge flowed forth. He heated it. From it, when heated, these syllables flowed forth: bhūh, bhuvaḥ, svah.

He heated them. From them, when heated, om flowed forth. So, as all the leaves are

threaded on a spike, so all speech is threaded on *om*. *Om* itself is this universe.²⁹
(*ChUp* 2, 23, 2-3)

Here the threefold analysis of *om* itself is not mentioned; the point, as in the *JaiUpBr* passage, is the unity of *om*.

In each of these three passages, the existence of the worlds precedes that of *om*. The *AiBr* passage is a cosmogony, but not the other two; in the *JaiUpBr* passage, Prajāpati's exploit is not to produce the worlds but to conquer them and to secure his conquest against rivals. The *ChUp* passage relates the derivation from the world of a body of discourse, the Veda, by which it can be referred to and comprehended. The Veda in turn is referred to and comprehended by the three *vyāhṛtis*, and the *vyāhṛtis* by *om*. But the concluding sentence shows that the possibility of comprehending the world through language is not merely incidental to the world: *om*, which unites all speech, is identified with the world. We may expand the argument by saying that since language is the means by which we know individual things, *om*, which is the whole of language, is the means by which we know the whole world.

We often find in the Upaniṣads that the world is thought of not as having absolute existence independent of ourselves, but only in so far as it impinges on our consciousness; sometimes this way of thinking goes so far as to make consciousness the source of the world (*BṛhUp* 2, 1, 20). The same tendency underlies the analysis of the world into five elements on the basis of the five senses by which phenomena can be apprehended; this analysis, though associated with classical Sāṃkhya, can be traced much earlier in the Upaniṣads. But, as some modern philosophers have shown, our knowledge of the world depends not only on our consciousness and senses, but on the shared view of the world which we receive, in part at least, from language; it is natural, therefore, especially in view of the importance of language in their ritual, that the Vedic thinkers should sometimes place language in the forefront of their accounts of cosmology and cosmogony. *Om*, then, according to the above passage (*ChUp* 2, 23, 2-3), is the whole of speech, including the three *vyāhṛtis* which represent the three worlds, and the three Vedas which contain all knowledge; *om* is therefore the whole world, in so far as it can be represented in language and so made accessible to our consciousness.

Being the irreducible essence of the three Vedas and of the triple world, *om* has a natural affinity with Brahman. Brahman was originally a ritual term, referring to the sacrifice and the words spoken in it; sometimes, in Vedic and post-Vedic Sanskrit, it can be simply translated 'Veda'. That the cause of the universe is called Brahman in the Upaniṣads results from an old idea, expressed in the hymns and Brāhmaṇas, that the universe originated from sacrifice. Since the syllable *om*, like Brahman, pervades the ritual and the three Vedas, thus uniting language and, with it, the universe which contains all the referents of language and is embodied and renewed in the ritual, we can understand why the *KaUp*, in a verse already quoted, should say:

This syllable alone is Brahman. (*KaUp* 2, 16a)

The same passage describes *om* as that

Desiring which, people lead the life of the Vedic disciple (*brahmācarya*). (*KaUp* 2, 15c)

This suggests that the austere life required while learning the Veda leads not just to proficiency as a priest, but to something beyond: not just to knowledge of the many syllables which make up the Veda, but to knowledge of the Syllable in the highest heaven. The highest aim of man, which in the Upaniṣads is variously called Brahman, immortality, release from fetters, etc., is here called the word (*pada*), identified as *om*; as we have seen, *pada* also

means 'step', suggesting the highest step of Viṣṇu mentioned in the next chapter (*KaUp* 3, 9).

Though the Upaniṣads say many different things about man's highest aim, they are generally agreed that it is reached by knowledge. True knowledge is not knowledge of many things, but of the one, often called Brahman; the contrast between this knowledge and the knowledge displayed by the ritual functionaries is stated more than once (*BṛhUp* 4, 4, 21; *MuUp* 1, 1, 4-5), and dramatized in several Upaniṣadic narratives (*ChUp* 6, 1; *ChUp* 7, 1, 1-3; *KaUp* 1-2). The syllable *om* is mentioned several times as a means to this knowledge, or as a symbol of the ultimate reality.

The *MuUp* uses an analogy to show how *om* should be used as a means of uniting oneself with Brahman by knowledge:

The syllable *om* is the bow, the self is the arrow;
Brahman is called its target,
Which must be pierced unerringly.
Like an arrow, one should unite oneself with it.³⁰

(*MuUp* 2, 2, 4; cf. *MaiUp* 6, 24, where the analogy is elaborated)

The *ŚvetUp* uses an analogy based on the process of making fire by friction, used in Vedic ritual; in the Vedic view, the fire was already latent in the two pieces of wood, the act of friction being merely a way of bringing it out. The action of the fire-drill can symbolize the sexual act, the upper piece being male and the lower female, as suggested by the word 'womb' (*yoni*) below; but it can also symbolize meditation on the self:

As the form of fire, when it is in its womb,
Is not seen, and yet its trace is not destroyed—
It can be brought out again from the womb of the fuel—
So it is, in both ways, in the body with the syllable *om*.³¹

(*ŚvetUp* 1, 13)

This means that Brahman is already within us as the self, and can be found through meditation, as the next verse explains:

By making one's body the wood,
And the syllable *om* the upper wood,
By the constant friction of meditation
One can see the god, like something hidden.³²

(*ŚvetUp* 1, 14)

A more elaborate discussion of this kind of meditation makes use of the notion that *om* is threefold (whether because of its extra-long pronunciation, or its analysis into *a + u + m*). It also uses two other triads which we have met already in the same connection: the three Vedas, and the three layers of the world: earth, air (here associated with the moon) and sky (represented by the sun). Yet another triad is now brought in: the three paths of the dead described in the two oldest Upaniṣads (*BṛhUp* 6, 2, 15-16; *ChUp* 5, 10; cf. *KaUp* 1). One of these leads to rebirth (in sub-human form according to *BṛhUp* and *ChUp*); one leads to the moon (associated with the ancestors, and, as often in the Veda, with the mind), and then to rebirth (in human form), while the third leads to the world of Brahman from which there is no rebirth. These three paths are here said to await those who meditate on one, two or all three segments of *om*:

If he meditates on it in one segment (*mācra*), he is enlightened by that alone, and quickly returns to the earth. The Ṛg-Veda leads him to the world of men. There, endowed with asceticism, chastity and faith, he enjoys greatness.
If in two segments, he reaches the mind; he is led by the Yajur-Veda to the air, to

the world of the moon. Having enjoyed glory in the world of the moon, he comes back again.

But he who meditates on the highest Man with this syllable itself in three segments, thus: *om*—he reaches light, the sun; as a snake is freed from its skin, he is freed from evil and is led by the *Sāma-Veda* to the world of Brahman. He sees the dweller in the city, the Man, higher than the highest living thing.³³ (PrUp 5, 3-5)

Numbers, as well as language, play a large part in Vedic thought: if two sets of ideas share the same number, they belong together. Thus the five senses are linked to the five elements (space, wind, fire, water and earth) and also to the five layers of bricks in the Vedic altar; similarly, the three segments of *om* can be linked to the three Vedas, the earth, air and sky, and the three paths of the dead. Moreover, if something consists of a certain number of parts, an extra part can be added to complete the whole. Thus the moon, which as it waxes or wanes gains or loses one fifteenth of its orb in each lunar day, is said to consist of sixteen parts: one for each lunar day and one more, so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Gonda 1965: 122-5). Again, some ancient triads have been expanded into tetrads by adding a fourth which stands against, supersedes or embraces the original three: the four-*varṇa* system is formed by adding the non-*Āryan śūdras* to the *Āryan* social system of priesthood, nobility and people; the *saṃnyāsin*, who has renounced all status, is added to the student, householder and hermit to form the four stages of life; and the *Atharva-Veda*, which has no place in the main system of Vedic ritual yet claims superiority over it (Gonda 1975: 268-71), becomes the fourth Veda. The triad of the three segments of *om* was similarly expanded into a tetrad, implicitly in the *MaiUp* and explicitly in the *MāUp*.

The *MaiUp* is a composite text whose earliest stratum is an early prose Upaniṣad having close affinities with the *TaiUp* (van Buitenen 1962: 29-72). This stratum begins by referring to the rite of laying the sacrificial fires, which, as is later made clear (*MaiUp* 6, 34) are three in number, corresponding to the three worlds. They are to be identified with the self (*MaiUp* 1, 1), which is both the microcosmic self known as the breath in the body, and the macrocosmic self, the sun (*MaiUp* 6, 1). Both these are to be meditated on by means of *om*, the three *vyāhṛtis* (*bhūh*, *bhuvah*, *svah*), and the *Sāvitrī* mantra (*MaiUp* 6, 2); we are thus presented with a set of triads (fires, segments of *om*, *vyāhṛtis*, lines of the *Sāvitrī*) which unite the microcosm, the macrocosm and the ritual.

The Upaniṣad then proceeds with a binary opposition between the contingent and the transcendent:

There are two forms of Brahman: the formed and the formless. The formed is Untruth (*asatyā*); the formless is Truth, it is Brahman, it is light. Light is the sun. The sun is *om*.³⁴ (MāUp 6, 3)

Thus far, we have on the one hand the formless Brahman which is beyond our world, and therefore true, and on the other hand the formed Brahman which is our world and therefore untrue.³⁵ This formless Brahman, unlike the qualityless Brahman posited later by Advaita Vedānta, is not thought of as totally unmanifest: a similar passage identifies it with the wind, the air, and the 'man' (*puruṣa*) in the sun in the macrocosm, and with the breath, the space within oneself, and the 'man' in the right eye in the microcosm (*BṛhUp* 2, 3, 1-5). In the *MaiUp* passage, the formless Brahman is manifested macrocosmically as the sun, which, though located in the sky, rules over the triple world both by looking down on it and by measuring time; it is also manifested

as *oṃ*, the foundation of speech and ritual. The Upaniṣad continues in the manner of a cosmogony, saying of this Brahman-*oṃ*:

It became a self. It divided itself into three; *oṃ* is in three segments (*mātrā*). By means of these, the whole universe is woven, warp and woof, on it [sc. on Brahman].³⁶

(*MaiUp* 6, 3)

The *MaiUp* as it has come down to us is interrupted at this point by some further remarks about *oṃ* to which we shall return, but which van Buitenen (1962: 41) has shown to be later additions. The cosmogony which then follows, however, is parallel to the above, and to some extent explains it: it elaborates the threefold character of *oṃ* already mentioned, associating it with the three *vyāhṛtis*, and through them with what is clearly an anthropomorphic representation of the three worlds, and at the same time a prototype of the ordinary man:

Now, the universe was unuttered. He, the Truth, Prajāpati, made heat, and uttered in turn: *bhūh*, *bhuvah*, *svah*. This is Prajāpati's firmest body, the one containing the worlds: *svah* is its head, *bhuvah* its navel, *bhūh* its feet.³⁷

(*MaiUp* 6, 6)

The name Prajāpati is new to this passage, but is familiar as the subject of cosmogonies of this kind. He utters (*vyāhṛ*) the hitherto unuttered universe by pronouncing the three utterances (*vyāhṛti*); this ritual act is also a creative act, since, as we need not be told, the three *vyāhṛtis* correspond to earth, atmosphere and sky. Another correspondence passed over in silence here, but implicit in the sequel, is that between the three worlds (*AiBr* 5, 32) or the three *vyāhṛtis* (*PrUp* 5, 3-5) and the three segments of *oṃ*.

Besides this threefold contingent manifestation of Brahman-Prajāpati, he is also manifest as the sun, which is transcendent in that it rules over time and the three worlds. The microcosmic counterpart of the sun is the eye; as explained elsewhere,

This man who is seen in the eyes he is the self...He is the immortal; the fearless; he is Brahman.³⁸

(*ChUp* 4, 15, 1; cf. *BṛhUp* 2, 3, 5; *BṛhUp* 4, 2; *ChUp* 1, 7, 5)

After enumerating the three *vyāhṛtis* and the three parts of Prajāpati's body, the *MaiUp* continues:

The sun is its eye; for the great segment of a man resides in the eye...The eye is Truth.³⁹

(*MaiUp* 6, 6)

Though *oṃ* is not mentioned here, the use of the term *mātrā* ('minimal metrical unit of time; segment') shows that it is still to be kept in mind. By combining the binary opposition between contingent and transcendent with the threefold analysis of the contingent, we have a set of tetrads: earth, atmosphere, sky—sun; feet, navel, head—eye; *a*, *u*, *m*—the great segment. The fourth member of each tetrad is not on the same level as the other three; it transcends, unites and rules over them. There is a suggestion that the three lines of the *Sāvitrī* mantra also have a transcendent fourth, the word *bhargas* (*MaiUp* 6, 7); there is a more explicit account of the fourth line of the *Sāvitrī* in *BṛhUp* 5, 14, which will be discussed shortly. But the *MaiUp* passage gives no indication of what is the fourth segment of *oṃ*, nor of what is the fourth *vyāhṛti*. A fourth *vyāhṛti*, *mahaḥ* 'greatness', was introduced by one Māhācamasya (*TaiUp* 1, 5), as mentioned above; the choice of the word *mahaḥ* is no doubt connected with the *mahatī mātrā* 'great segment' mentioned here. The *MaiUp* may understand *mahaḥ* as the fourth *vyāhṛti*, or it may deliberately leave it with no utterable form; it may also understand the fourth *mātrā* of *oṃ* to be the syllable itself.

The idea of a fourth, formless or transcendent part of *om* is developed in one of the most influential of all Upaniṣads, the brief and cryptic *MāUp*.

This Upaniṣad begins by linking *om* to yet another triad, to which it then adds a mysterious fourth member:

Om: this syllable is the universe. The explanation of it is: the whole universe, past, present and future, is *om*; and whatever else is beyond the three times, is also *om*.⁴⁰
(*MāUp* 1)

That *om* includes the three aspects in which we experience time, and also eternity which is beyond our experience, follows from its being the whole universe, which in turn follows from its identity with Brahman.

The *MāUp* also uses the common Upaniṣadic identification of Brahman with the conscious self underlying all our experience. The *BṛhUp* describes three states of this self: waking, when we experience the world around us; dreaming, when we experience a world we have ourselves created by 'taking the material of this all-containing world, taking it to pieces, and putting it together again'; and dreamless sleep, when we are conscious of nothing outside ourselves, but our conscious self remains, in a state of quasi-sexual union with itself, enjoying a state of supreme bliss which is the world of Brahman (*BṛhUp* 4, 3, 19-33). The *ChUp* expresses dissatisfaction with this state of bliss (which we cannot even remember when we wake up): it is no better than annihilation (*ChUp* 8, 11, 1-2). It accordingly adds a fourth state, in which the self is free from the body; but it is hard to see what this state is, and from the description, 'laughing, playing, enjoying oneself with women, chariots and friends' (*ChUp* 8, 12, 3), it appears to be only a superior kind of dream.

The *MāUp* also describes waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep, calling them 'feet' or 'quarters' of the self, and identifying them with the three segments (*mātrā*) of *om*: *a*, *u*, *m*. It then adds a fourth, but this is described in very different terms from the fourth state of the *ChUp* passage:

They think of the fourth as unseen, not to be dealt with, impalpable, featureless, unthinkable, unnameable, the essence of the knowledge of the one Self, the cessation of phenomena, peaceful, benign, without duality. It is the Self; it is what should be known.⁴¹
(*MāUp* 7)

Like the triad of past, present and future, the triad of states of the self is here expanded by the addition of a fourth which is not a further member of the series, but transcends it.

This 'fourth' is often interpreted as a state of trance, such as is experienced by mystics when they lose all knowledge of worldly phenomena and even of their own personalities (e.g., Radhakrishnan 1953: 698f; Eliade 1969: 124). However, it appears from the text that it is not a state of the self in the same way as waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep are; it is not described as a state (*sthāna*) of the self, as these are (*MāUp* 3-5), but as the self itself. Our experience of waking, dreaming and sleeping shows us that we have a self, which at different times is aware of the outside world, or aware of an inner world, or aware only of its own unity as a 'mass of knowledge' (*prajñāna-ghana*) (*MāUp* 5; cf. *BṛhUp* 4, 3, 23-32). But these experiences do not tell us directly about the self, but only about the objects of which it is conscious. What the Upaniṣad is trying to do is to know the self—which is also Brahman—as it is, and not in relation, even negatively, to anything else:

Not inwardly knowing, not outwardly knowing, not knowing both ways, not a mass of knowledge, not knowing, not unknowing.⁴²
(*MāUp* 7)

The word for 'fourth' here (*MĀUp* 7; 12) is *caturtha*, the usual word for 'fourth' in classical Sanskrit and also in the Upanisads. This word, though it has apparent cognates in other Indo-European languages, seems a relatively late formation (Mayrhofer 1956: vol. I, p. 515); at any rate, it does not occur in the *ṚV*, where the word for 'fourth' is *turīya*. In later literature, including several Upanisads which are outside the generally accepted canon, the archaic word *turīya* is treated as a technical term for the mystical state to which the *MĀUp* was thought to refer (also *turya*, *MaiUp* 6, 19).

The use of *turīya* in this connection is suggested by an older passage (*BṛhUp* 5, 14) which follows the same pattern of adding a transcendent fourth to a series of three. This passage links the three *padas* (lines, literally 'steps') of the Sāvitrī mantra (*ṚV* 3, 57, 10) with earth, air and sky, the three Vedas, and a set of three breaths (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*; other passages speak of five breaths, adding *samāna* and *udāna*); it also links the eight syllables in each line of the mantra with the eight syllables made up by the names of the members of each of these triads. It then adds a fourth *pada*, on which the mantra is founded (*BṛhUp* 5, 14, 4), but which cannot be obtained (*BṛhUp* 5, 14, 6); unlike the three actual lines of the Sāvitrī, it has no manifest form. The idea of a formless fourth *pada* of the Sāvitrī is suggested by the fact that the Gāyatrī metre, in which this mantra is composed, is unusual in having only three lines, the pattern of four lines, of whatever form, being predominant in Vedic and even more so in classical metre; and also by the close relation between the two words *pada* 'step; word; line of verse' and *pāda* 'foot; quarter; line of verse', the latter being often used in describing anything that needs four parts to be complete. The *BṛhUp* passage refers to this fourth *pada* by the archaic word *turīya*; and in the other Upanisads this word is not used except in a sense which is clearly traceable to the same passage.⁴³

If the Sāvitrī is completed and supported by a fourth, unmanifest line, it follows that the syllable *om*, which is closely related to the Sāvitrī both through their use in daily recitation and in having three segments corresponding to the Sāvitrī's three lines, may also be supported and completed by an unmanifest fourth; and so we find in the *MĀUp*:

The fourth is not a segment, not to be dealt with, the cessation of phenomena, benign, non-dual; thus the sound *om* is the Self itself.⁴⁴ (*MĀUp* 12)

This description of the fourth which is not a segment of *om* but the whole, partly echoes the description of the fourth which is not a state of the self but the self itself (*MĀUp* 7), and identifies the two. Just as the phonetically monophthongal sound *om* is the basis of the three segments *a + u + m* into which it is analysed phonologically, so the self is the basis of the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep by which we recognize it.⁴⁵

It is not certain, though it seems probable, that the idea of the fourth, formless *pada* of the Sāvitrī mantra (*BṛhUp* 5, 14) is the model for that of the fourth which is the syllable *om*. It is clear, however, that the application to it of the term *turīya* underlies the subsequent use of the same term for the fourth state of the self.

Speculation on the syllable *om* continues in the later Upanisads; but as there is no fixed canon of Upanisads, it would be inconvenient to pursue the matter further, as well as increasingly irrelevant to the study of the Vedic outlook. The analysis of *om* into triads also continues. A passage inserted in the *MaiUp*, after the one we have discussed, identifies it not only with the three *vyāhṛtis*, the three Vedas, with fire, wind and sun (located in the three worlds), and with past, present and future (as *MĀUp* 1), but also with the three fires (an identification perhaps implicit in the original version of this

Upaniṣad); the three genders masculine, feminine and neuter; breath, fire and sun; food, water and moon (these two triads again being located in the three worlds); the three elements of personality buddhi, manas and ahaṃkāra; the three breaths prāṇa, apāna and vyāna (*BṛhUp* 5, 14 above); and the three gods Brahmā, Rudra and Viṣṇu. This last triad became a standard interpretation of *oṃ*, but in a different order: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra (also called Śiva); this order is required by their respective functions as creator, preserver and destroyer of the world.

In this attempt to examine an aspect of the Vedic outlook which has to do with language, we have from time to time drawn on modern linguistic ideas. This is not to suggest that any modern system of thought provides a key with which Vedic thought can be decoded, and the logical gaps in the texts filled in, as Deussen used nineteenth-century idealism to decode and supplement the doctrine of the ātman; rather, it enables us to find in the texts something that makes sense to us, instead of regarding them as a set of arbitrary or irrational assertions.

In applying modern categories we should not lose sight of what we can discern of the Vedic outlook itself; and since our direct evidence consists entirely of texts, this means using one passage to illuminate another and finding the recurrent features, and especially the recurrent collocations, sequences, and patterns of features, which show that we are dealing with an ordered system. Nor should we think only in terms of one Vedic outlook: while the systematic similarities between passages may show us an overall continuum stretching from the hymns to the verse Upaniṣads and beyond, the systematic differences show that the outlook is constantly being shifted, and sometimes consciously adjusted or even revolutionized, by thinkers who were creative as well as traditional, and capable of giving new meanings to old words, old phrases and sometimes even old verses.

NOTES

- 1 Panikkar (1977) is a notable, though eccentric, exception. Gonda's works are full of information, though sometimes it is hard to interpret.
- 2 *Ūpa te gā lvākaraṃ.../rātri stomaṃ nā jigyuṣe.*
- 3 *tvām hī stoma-vārdhana īndrāsy uktha-vārdhanaḥ.*
- 4 *brahmāyām vācāḥ paramām vyōma.* For the association of speech with 'highest heaven', cf. *RV* 1, 164, 39a (below, n11).
- 5 *bṛhaspate prathamām vācā śraṇam yāt prāirata nāmadhēyaṃ dādhanāḥ/ yād eṣām śrésṭham yād aripṛām āsīt prenā tād eṣām nihitam gūhāvīḥ* (1). *sāktum iva tītaunā punānto yātra dhīrā mānasā vācam ākrata/ ātrā sākhyāḥ śakhyāni jānate bhadrāṣṭām lakṣmīr nihitādhi vācī* (2). *yajñēna vācāḥ padavīyam āyan tām ānuvindann ṛṣiṣu prāvīṣṭām/ tām ābhṛtyā vyādadhuḥ purutrā tām saptā rebhā abhī sām navante* (3).
- 6 *utā tvaḥ pāsyan nā dadarśa vācam utā tvaḥ śṛṇvān na śṛṇoty enām/ utō tvasmai tanvām vī sasre jāyēva pātya usatī suvāsāḥ.*
- 7 *vāco-vīdam vācam udīrāyantiṃ vīsvabhir dhībhir upatīṣṭhamānām/ devīṃ devūbhyah pāry eyuṣiṃ gām ā māvṛkta mārtyo dabhrā-cetāḥ.* cf. Gonda 1963: 91-3.
- 8 *āmedhyo vāī pūruṣo yād āṅṅtam vādati...satyām evā devā āṅṅtam manūṣyā idām ahām āṅṅtāt satyām ūpaimīti tan manūṣyebhyo devām ūpaiti.*
- 9 *padām yād vīṣṇor upamāṃ nichāyi tēna pāsi gūhyam nāma gōnām.*
- 10 *uṣāsah pūrvā ādha yād vyūṣūc mahād vi jājñe akṣāraṃ padō gōḥ.*
- 11 *ṛcō akṣāre paramē vyōman yāsmīn devā ādhi vīśve nīseduḥ/ yās tām nā vēda kīm ṛcā kariṣyati yā īt tād vidūs tē imē sām āsate.*

a

- 17 tad vā etad akṣaram gārgy adṛṣṭam draṣṭr adṛutaṃ śrotṛ amatam manīḥ...utasmim u khalu akṣare gārgy ākāśa etad ca protaś ceti.
- 18 akṣaram brahma paramam.
- 19 yad akṣaram veda-vide vadanti.
- 20 gaurīr mimāya salisāni tākṣaty ēka-pādī dvi-pādī sā cātuṣ-pādī/ aṣṭā-pādī bahbhūvuṣī saḥśrākṣarāḥ paramē vyōman (41). tāsyāḥ samudrā śchi vī kṣaranti tēna jīvanti pradīśāś cātascrah/ tātah kṣaraty akṣāram tād vīśvam ūpa jīvati (42).
- 21 udṛīva vajirā avatō nā sīṛcatō kṣarantīndra dhītāyah. In van Buitenen (1959: 180, n15) the reference to this verse is misprinted.
- 22 tad akṣarad eva. yad akṣarad eva tasmād akṣaram (1). yad v evākṣaram nākṣiyata tasmād akṣayam. akṣayam ha vai nāmaitat. tad akṣaram iti paroḥsam ācakṣate (2). cf. ŚBr 6, 1, 3, 6. I take *akṣarat* as a present participle with the negative prefix *a-*. Van Buitenen (1959: 179) takes it as an imperfect: 'that flowed, hence it is *akṣara*.' This interpretation seems to imply that the author etymologized *akṣara* on the principle of *lūxerā a non lūxerā* (cf. Gonda 1955: 64); it would make my argument more complicated, but would not invalidate it.
- 23 sarve vedā yat padam ānarsanti tapānsi sarvāṇi ca yad vadanti/ yad icchanto brahmacaryam caranti tat te padam saṅgrahena bravīmy om ity etat (15). etad dhyevākṣaram brahma etad dhy evākṣaram param/ etad dhy evākṣaram jñātva yo yad icchati tasya tat (16).
- 24 Buseparanil (1977: 440) says that *udgīṭva* is a name of *om*. This seems to be a misunderstanding of *Chh* 1, 1, 1, which is not a statement of identity but an injunction to identify the syllable *om* mentally with the *udgīṭva*. Zashner (1966: 34) shows the same misunderstanding.
- 25 om iti brahma. om itīdam sarvam...o śrāvayety āśrāvayanti. om iti sāmāni gāyanti. om śom iti śastrāṇi śamsanti. om ity adhvaryuḥ pratiḡaram pratiḡnāti. om iti brahmā prastauti. om ity agnihotram amujānāti.
- 26 toneyam trayī vidyā vartate. om ity āśrāvayati. om iti śaṃsati. om ity udgāyati.
- 27 tad vā etad amujānākṣaram. yad dhi kim cānujānāty om ity eva tadāha.
- 28 katy eva devā yāyāvalkyeti. traya iti. om iti hovāca.
- 29 anuṣiṣṭo nu asi pitṛeti. om iti hovāca.
- 30 om ity iḥaḥ pratiḡara evam tatheti gāthāyā om iti vai dalvaṃ tatheti māruṣam.
- 31 A phonetic description tells us how the sounds of a language are pronounced; a phonological description tells us how these sounds may be reinterpreted as a system of abstract units. The reasons for the analysis of *o* into *a* and *u* lie in certain paradigmatic relations between these sounds which are familiar to all Sanskritists, and which incidentally have enabled comparative philologists to reconstruct an older diphthongal pronunciation of *o* (Allen 1953: 12f; 62-4). A fairly simple example of these relations is the way *śroti* 'he hears' is to *śrutāḥ* 'they two hear' as *asti* 'he is' is to *stāḥ* 'they two are'; an even simpler one is the fact that what we call the *Katha Upaniṣad* is in Sanskrit *kaṭhapaniṣat*.
- 32 The details of the ancient pronunciation are more complex and not fully known (Allen 1953: 39-46); but this statement seems reasonable in the case of *om*.
- 33 prajāpatir vā idam trayeṇa vedena jeyad yad asyedam jitam tat (1). sa akṣata ittham ced vā anye devā arena vedena yekṣanta imāḥ vāva te jitam jeyanti yeyam mama. hanta trayasya vedasya rasam ādadaḥ iti (2). sa bhūr ity evatvedasya rasam ādatta. seyam pṛthivy abhavat. tasya yo rasah prāṇedat so 'gnir abhavat rasasya rasah (3). bhūva ity eva yajurvedasya rasam ādatta. tad idam antarikṣam abhavat. tasya yo rasah prāṇedat sa vāyur abhavat rasasya rasah (4). svar ity eva sūmavedasya rasam ādatta. so 'sau dyauc abhavat. tasya yo rasah prāṇedat sa ādityo 'bhavad rasasya rasah (5). athaikasyalvākṣarasya rasam nāsakrod ādātum om ity etasyaiva (6). seyam vāg abhavat. om eva rūmāigā tasyā u prāṇa eva rasah (7).
- 34 prajāpatir lokān abhyatapat. tebhyo 'bhītaptebhyas trayī vidyā samprāśravat. tām abhyatapat. tasyā bhītapṭāyā etāny akṣarāṇi samprāśravanta bhūr bhuvah svar iti (2). tāny abhyatapat. tebhyo 'bhītaptebhyas omkārah samprāśravat. tad yathā śānkunā sarvāṇi

- parāṇi saṁpṛiṣṭvā evaṁ oṁkāreṇa sarvā vāk saṁpṛiṣṭvā oṁkāre evedam sarvaṁ oṁkāre evedam sarvaṁ (3). The word for 'spike' (*śrūku*) is often translated 'stalk' here, or even less appropriately 'vein' (as if the same vein could run through several leaves!), apparently because readers could not understand why a collection of leaves should be threaded on a spike. Van Buitenen (1959: 180, n17) points out the parallel *Śūlp* 1, 10, 2, which has *śūkrī* 'needle' for *śrūku*; he suggests that both passages refer to 'herb-leaves stuck on a spike to dry'.
- 30 praṇavo dharmā śaro ny ātmā brahma tal-lakṣyaṁ ucyate/ apramattena veddhavyaṁ śaravat tan-mayo bhavet.
- 31 vahner yathā yoni-gataṣya mūrtir na drśyate naiva ca līṅga-nāśat/ sa bhūya evendhana-yoni-gṛhyaṁ tad uobhayaṁ vai pranaṣena dehe.
- 32 sva-deham arāṇiṁ kṛtvā praṇavaṁ cottarāraṇiṁ/ dhyāna-nirmathanābhyaśād devaṁ paśyen nigūḍhavat.
- 33 sa yady eka-mātram abhidhyāyīta. sa tenaiva saṁveditas tūcyaṁ eva jaṣatyāṁ abhisāpadyate. tam ꣳṇa manuṣya-lokam upanayante. sa tatra tapasā brahmacaryeṇa śradhāyā saṁpanno mahimānam anubhavati (3). atha yadi dvi-mātreṇa manasī saṁpadyate. so 'ntarīkṣaṁ ya jurbhir unīyate soma-lokam. sa soma-loke vibhūtim anubhūya purar āvartate (4). yā purar etaṁ tri-mātreṇomīty etenalvākṣareṇa paraṁ puruṣaṁ abhidhyāyīta. sa tejaśi sūryaṁ saṁpannah. yathā pādodaras tvacā vinirmucyate. evaṁ ha vai sa pāpanā vinirmuktaḥ sa sāmāhīr unīyate brahma-lokam. sa etasmūj jīva-ghanāt parāt paraṁ purīṣayaṁ puruṣaṁ īkṣate.
- 34 due vāva brahmaro rūpe mūrtam cāmūrtam ca. atha yan mūrtam tad asatyam yad amūrtam tat satyam. tad brahma taj jyotiḥ. yaj jyotiḥ sa ādityaḥ. sa vā eṣa om iti.
- 35 In earlier formulations the opposition is between the formed which is *sat* and the formless which is *tyat* 'yonder' (*BṛhUp* 2, 3, 1-5; *TaitUp* 2, 6; cf. van Buitenen (1966:40-1)); now the formless is called *satya*, so that the formed has to be *asatya*. However, the notion that this world is untrue (*anṛta*) while the other world is true (*satya*) is not new; cf. *ŚR* 1, 1, 1, 4 above.
- 36 etad ātmābhavat. sa trechāteānaṁ vyakuruta. om iti tisro mātrāḥ. etābhīḥ sarvaṁ idam otaṁ protaṁ caivāśmīn.
- 37 athāvāhyantaṁ vā idam āsīt. sa satyaṁ pra jāpatis tapas taptvānuyāharad bhūr bhuvah svar iti. eṣaivāśya pra jāpateḥ sthaviṣṭhā tanūr yā lokavatīti. svar ity aśyāḥ śiro nābhīr bhuvā bhūḥ pādāḥ.
- 38 ya eṣo 'kṣiṇī puruṣo drśyate eṣa ātmeti hovāca. etad anṛtam abhayaṁ etad brahmeti.
- 39 ādityaś cakṣuḥ cakṣur-āyattā hī puruṣasya mahatī mātrā...satyaṁ vai cakṣuḥ.
- 40 om ity etad akṣaraṁ idam sarvaṁ. tasyopavyākhyānam. bhūtam bhavad bhaviṣyad iti sarvaṁ oṁkāra eva. yac cāryat tri-kālātītam tad apy oṁkāra eva.
- 41 adṛṣṭam avyavahāryam agrāhyam alakṣaṇam acintyaṁ avyapadeśyam ekātma-psatyaya-sācam pra-paṅcōpaśamaṁ sāntaṁ śīvam advaitaṁ caturthaṁ manyante. sa ātmā. sa vijñeyaḥ.
- 42 nāntaḥ-prajñāḥ na bahīḥ-prajñāḥ nobhayataḥ-prajñāḥ na pra jñāna-ghanaḥ na pra jñān nāpra jñān.
- 43 The *BṛhUp* passage also mentions a practice of reciting the Sāvitrī mantra in the anuṣṭubh metre, which has four lines (*BṛhUp* 5, 14, 5). This probably refers to *RV* 5, 82, 1, an anuṣṭubh verse resembling the well-known *RV* 3, 57, 10; its use in a rite is prescribed in *ChUp* 5, 2, 7. The *BṛhUp* passage condemns the recitation of this four-line mantra, perhaps because it precludes the notion of a formless fourth *pada*.
- 44 amātraś caturtho 'vyavahāryaḥ prapaṅcōpaśamaḥ śīva 'ovaltaḥ. ekam oṁkāra ātmaiva.
- 45 There may also be some connection between the idea that *om* has more than three segments and the statement of the relatively recent Sāmavedic manual *Mātrā-Lakṣaṇa* that *om* has a duration of $3\frac{1}{2}$ mātrās (Howard 1977: 40).

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Shankaracharya
Pranava Mantra

शङ्कराचार्योपपादितः -- प्रणवमन्त्रः

अथ प्रणवसंज्ञकं प्रतिवदामि मन्त्रं परं
सजापमपि सार्चनं सहृतक्लृप्ति सोपासनम् ।
अशेषदुरितापहं विविधकामकल्पद्रुमम्
विमुक्तिफलसिद्धिदं विमलयोगिसंसेवितम् ॥ १ ॥

आद्यस्वरः समेतो-
ऽमरेण सधसप्तमश्च विन्दुयुतः ।
प्रोक्तः स्यात्प्रणवमनु-
स्त्रिमात्रिकः सर्वमन्त्रसमवायी ॥ २ ॥

मन्त्रस्यास्य मुनिः प्रजापतिरथ च्छन्दश्च देव्यादिका
गायत्री गदिता जगत्सु परमात्माख्यस्तथा देवता ।
अक्लीवैर्युगमध्यगध्रुवयुतैरङ्गानि कुर्यात्स्वरै-
र्मन्त्री जातियुतैश्च सत्यरहितैर्वा व्याहृतीभिः क्रमात् ॥ ३ ॥

विष्णुं भास्वत्किरीटाङ्गदवलययुगाकल्पहारोदराङ्घ्रि
श्रोणीरूपं^१ सवक्षोमणिमकरमहाकुण्डलामण्डिताङ्गम् ।
हस्तोद्यन्त्रक्रशङ्खाम्बुजगदममलं पीतकौशेयमाशा-
विद्योतद्वासमुद्यद्दिनकरसदृशं पद्मसंस्थं नमामि ॥ ४ ॥

दीक्षितो मनुमिमं शतलक्षम्
संजपत्प्रतिहुनेश्च दशांशम् । [हवे?]
पायसैर्घृतयुतैश्च तदन्ते
विप्रभूरुहभवाः समिधो वा ॥ ५ ॥

सर्पिःपायसशाली-
तिलसमिदाद्यैरनेन यो जुह्यात् ।
ऐहिकपारत्रिकमपि

^१ श्रोणीमूपम्

स तु लभते वाञ्छितं फलं नचिरात् ॥ ६ ॥

अभ्यर्च्य वैष्णवमथो विधिनैव पीठ-

मावाह्य तत्र सकलार्थकरं मुकुन्दम् ।

अङ्गैः समूर्तियुगशक्तियुगैः सुरेन्द्र-

वज्रादिकैर्यजतु मन्त्रिवरः क्रमेण ॥ ७ ॥

वासुदेवः संकर्षणः प्रद्युम्नश्चानिरुद्धकः ।

स्फाटिकस्वर्णदूर्वेन्द्रनीलाभा वर्णतो मताः ॥ ८ ॥

चतुर्भुजाश्चक्रशङ्खगदापङ्कजधारिणः ।

किरीटकेयूरिणश्च पीताम्बरधरा अपि ॥ ९ ॥

सशान्तिश्रीसरस्वत्यौ रतिश्चाश्रिदलाश्रिताः ।

अच्छपद्मरजोदुग्धदूर्वावर्णाः स्वलंकृताः ॥ १० ॥

आत्मान्तरात्मपरमज्ञानात्मानस्तु मूर्तयः ।

निवृत्तिश्च प्रतिष्ठा च विद्या शान्तिश्च शक्तयः ॥ ११ ॥

ज्वलज्ज्वालासमाभाः स्युरात्माद्या मूर्तिशक्तयः ^२ ।

इति पञ्चावरणकं विधानं प्रणवोद्भवम् ॥ १२ ॥

इत्थं मन्त्री तारममुं जापहुतार्चा-

भेदैरङ्गीकृत्य च योगानपि युञ्ज्यात् ।

यैः संलब्ध्वा चेह समग्रां श्रियमन्ते

शुद्धं विष्णोर्धाम परं प्राप्स्यति योगी ॥ १३ ॥

०००

योगाग्निदूषणपरं त्वथ कामकोप-
लोभप्रमोहमदमत्सरतेति षट्कम् ।
वैरिं जयेत्सपदि योगविदेनमङ्गै-
र्योगस्य धीरमतिरष्टभिरिष्टदैश्व ॥ १५ ॥

यमनियमासनपवना-
यामाः प्रत्याहृतिश्च धारणया ।
ध्यानं चापि समाधिः
प्रोक्तान्यङ्गानि योगयोग्यानि ॥ १६ ॥

सत्यमहिंसा समता
धृतिरस्तेयं क्षमार्जवं च तथा ।
वैराग्यमिति यमः स्यात्
स्वाध्यायतपोऽर्चनाव्रतानि तथा ॥ १७ ॥

संतोषश्च सशौचो
नियमः स्यादासनं च पञ्चविधम् ।
पद्मस्वस्तिकभद्रक-
वज्रकवीराहयं क्रमात्तदपि ॥ १८ ॥

रेचकपूरककुम्भक-
भेदात् त्रिविधः प्रभञ्जनायामः ।
मुञ्चेद् दक्षिणयानिल-
मथानयेद्द्वामया च मध्यमया ॥ १९ ॥

संस्थापयेश्च नाड्ये-
त्येवं प्रोक्तानि रेचकादीनि ।
षोडशतद्विगुणचतुः-
षष्टिकमात्रानि तानि च क्रमशः ॥ २० ॥

चित्तात्मैक्यधृतस्य

प्राणस्य स्थानसंहतिः स्थानात् ।
प्रत्याहारो ज्ञेय-
श्चैतन्ययुतस्य सम्यगनिलस्य ॥ २१ ॥

स्थानस्थापनकर्म
प्रोक्ता स्याद्द्वारणेति तत्त्वज्ञैः ।
यो मनसि देवताया
भावः स्यात्तस्य मन्त्रिणः सम्यक् ॥ २२ ॥

संस्थापयेश्च तत्रे-
त्येवं ध्यानं वदन्ति तत्त्वविदः ।
सत्तामात्रं नित्यं
शुद्धमपि निरञ्जनं च यत्प्रोक्तम् ॥ २३ ॥

तत्प्रविचिन्त्य स तस्मिं-
श्चित्तलयः स्यात्समाधिरुद्दिष्टः ।
अष्टाङ्गैरिति कथितैः
पुनराशु निगृह्यतेऽरिरात्मविदा ॥ २४ ॥

अथ वा शोषणदहन-
प्लावनभेदेन शोधिते देहे ।
पञ्चाशद्विमात्रा-
भेदैर्विधिवत्समायमेत्प्राणान् ॥ २५ ॥

पञ्चाशदात्मकोऽपि च
कलाप्रभेदेन तार उद्दिष्टः ।
तावन्मात्रायमनात्
कलाश्च विधृता भवन्ति तत्त्वविदा ॥ २६ ॥

पूर्वमिडाया वदने
विचिन्तयेद् धूम्रमानिलं बीजम् ।
तेनागतेन देहं

प्रशोषयेत् सान्तराधिकरचरणम् ॥ २७ ॥

पिङ्गलया प्रतिमुञ्चेत्
तथैव कार्शानवेन रक्तरुचा ।
प्रतिदह्य पूर्वविधिना
मुञ्चेन्नैशाकरेण सुमितेन ॥ २८ ॥

संपूरयेत् सुधामय-
जलशीकरवर्षिणा तनुं सकलाम् ।
निर्माय मानसेन च
परिपूर्णमनाश्विरं भूयात् ॥ २९ ॥

सुजीर्णमितभोजनः सुखसमात्तनिद्रादिकः
सुशुद्धतलसद्गृहे विरहिते च शीतादिभिः ।
पटाजिनकुशोत्तरे सुविशदे च मृद्वासने
निमीलितविलोचनः प्रतिविशेत्सुखं प्राङ्मुखः ॥ ३० ॥

प्रसारितं वामकरं निजाङ्गे
निधाय तस्योपरि दक्षिणं च ।
ऋजुः प्रसन्नो विजितेन्द्रिः स-
न्नाधारमत्यन्तसमं स्मरेत्स्वम् ॥ ३१ ॥

तन्मध्यगतं प्रणवं
प्रणवस्थं विन्दुमपि च विन्दुगतम् ।
नादं विचिन्त्य तारं
यथावदुच्चारयेत्सुषुम्नान्तम् ॥ ३२ ॥

तन्मध्यगतं शुद्धं
शब्दब्रह्मातिसूक्ष्मतन्तुनिभम् ॥
तेजः स्मरेण तारा-
त्मकमपि मूलं चराचरस्य सदा ॥३३॥

ओंकारो गुणबीजं
प्रणवस्तारो ध्रुवश्च वेदादिः ।
आदिरुमध्यो मपरो
नामन्यस्य त्रिमात्रिकश्च तथा ॥ ३४ ॥

अस्य तु वेदादित्वात्
सर्वमनूनां प्रयुज्यतेऽथादौ ।
योनिश्च सर्वदेहे
भवति च स ब्रह्मसंवादे ॥ ३५ ॥

ऋक् च तदाद्यादिः स्यात्
तन्मध्यान्तं यजुश्च ^३मान्तादिः
सामापि तस्य भेदा
बहवः प्रोक्ता हि लोकवेदेषु ॥ ३६ ॥

उच्चार्योच्चार्यं तं
क्रमाच्चयेदुपरि षड्द्वयान्तान्तम् ।
मनसा स्मृते यदास्मिन्
मनो लयं याति तावदभ्यस्येत् ॥ ३७ ॥

अथ वा विन्दुं वर्तुल
मावतैस्त्रिभिरुपेतमेवमिव ।
प्रोतं रविविम्बेन च
समभ्यसेत्सुतसुधामयं तेजः ॥ ३८ ॥

अपमृत्युरोगपापजिद्
अचिरेण सुसिद्धिदो नृणां योगः ।
अथवा मूलाधारो
त्थिता प्रभा विसविभेदतन्तुनिभा ॥ ३९ ॥

वदनामृतकरविम्ब

^३ मान्तानि । सामानि ।

स्यूता ध्यातामृताम्बुलवलुलिता ।

स्थावरजङ्गमविषहृद्
योगोऽयं नात्र सन्देहः ॥ ४० ॥

अथवा त्रिवलयविन्दुग
धाम प्रणवेन संनयेदूर्ध्वम् ।
पीतोर्णातन्तुनिभं
सौपुम्नेनैव वर्त्मना योगी ॥ ४१ ॥

तस्मिन्निधाय चित्तं
विलयं गमयेद्विनेशसंख्यान्ते ।
पुनरावृत्तिविहीनं
निर्वाणपदं ब्रजेत्तदभ्यासात् ॥ ४२ ॥

अथ वादिवीजमौ पुन
रुमपि विषे तमपि संहरेद् विन्दौ
विन्दुं नादे तमपि च
शक्तौ शक्तिं तथैव शान्ताख्ये ॥ ४३ ॥

तेजस्यनन्वगे चिति
निर्द्वन्द्वे निष्कले सदानन्दे ।
सूक्ष्मे च सर्वतो मुख
करपदनयनादिलक्षणालक्ष्ये ॥ ४४ ॥

स्वात्मनि संहृत्यैवं
करणेन्द्रियवर्गनिर्गमापेतः ।
निर्लीनपुण्यपापो
निरुच्छ्वसन् ब्रह्मभूत एव स्यात् ॥ ४५ ॥

अथवा योगोपेताः
पञ्चावस्थाः क्रमेण विज्ञाय ।
ताभिर्युञ्जीत सदा

योगी सद्यः प्रसिद्धये मुक्तेः ॥ ४६ ॥

जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्ती
तुरीयतदतीतकौ पुनस्तासु ।
स्वैरिन्द्रियैर्यदात्मा
भुङ्क्ते भोगान्स जागरो भवति ॥ ४७ ॥

संज्ञारहितैरपि तै-
स्तस्यानुभवो भवेत्पुनः स्वप्नः ।
आत्मनिरुद्युक्ततया
नैराकुल्यं भवेत्सुषुप्तिरपि ॥ ४८ ॥

पश्यति परं यदात्मा
निस्तमसा तेजसा तुरीयं तत् ।
आत्मपरमात्मपदयो-
रभेदतो व्याप्नुयाद्यदा योगी ॥ ४९ ॥

तच्च तुरीयातीतं
तस्यापि भवेन्न दूरतो मुक्तिः ।
अथ वा सूक्ष्माख्यायां
पश्यन्त्यां मध्यमाख्यवैखर्योः ॥ ५० ॥

ससुषुम्नाग्रकयोरपि
युञ्जीयाज्जाग्रदादिभिः पवनम् ।
बीजोच्चारो जाग्रद्-
विन्दुः स्वप्नः सुषुप्तिरपि नादः ॥ ५१ ॥

शक्त्यात्मना तुरीयः
शान्ते लय आत्मनस्तुरीयान्तम् ।
अङ्गुष्ठगुल्फजङ्घा-
जानुद्वितीयं च सीवनी मेढ्रम् ॥ ५२ ॥

नाभिर्हृदयं ग्रीवा
सलम्बिकाग्रं तथैव नासाग्रम् ।

भ्रूमध्यललाटाग्रसु-
पुम्नाग्रं द्वादशान्तमित्येवम् ॥ ५३ ॥

उत्क्रान्तौ परकाय-
प्रवेशने चागतौ पुनः स्वतनौ ।
स्थानानि धारणायाः
प्रोक्तानि मरुत्प्रयोगविधिनिपुणैः ॥ ५४ ॥

स्थानेष्वेष्यात्ममनः-
समीरसंयोगकर्मणोऽभ्यासात् ।
अचिरेणोत्क्रान्त्याद्या
भवन्ति संसिद्धयः प्रसिद्धतराः ॥ ५५ ॥

कण्ठे भ्रूमध्ये हृदि
नाभौ सर्वाङ्गके स्मरेत्क्रमशः ।
लवरसमीरखवर्णे-
रनिलमहाकालवचनेयं स्यात् ॥ ५६ ॥

अवनिजलानलमारुत-
विहायसां शक्तिभिश्च ततद् विम्बैः ।
सारूप्यमात्मनश्च
प्रतिनीत्वा तत्तदाशु जयति सुधीः ॥ ५७ ॥

एवं प्रोक्तैर्योगै-

सिद्धय उपलक्ष्यन्ते
मोक्षपुरीसंप्रवेशनद्वाराः ॥ ५९ ॥

कम्पः पुलकानन्दौ
वैमल्यस्थैर्यलाघवानि तथा ।
सकलप्रकाशवित्ते-
त्यष्टावस्थाः प्रसूचकाः सिद्धेः ॥ ६० ॥

त्रैकाल्यज्ञानोहौ
मनोज्ञताच्छन्दतो मरुद्रोधः ।
नाडीसंक्रमणविधि-
र्वाक्सिद्धिर्देहतश्च देहाप्तिः ॥ ६१ ॥

ज्योतिःप्रकाशनं चे-
त्यष्टौ स्यु प्रत्ययायुजः सिद्धेः ।
अणिमा महिमा च तथा
लघिमा गरिमेशिता वशित्वं च ॥ ६२ ॥

प्राप्तिः प्राकाम्यं चे-
त्यष्टैघ्न्याणि योगयुक्तस्य ।
अष्टैश्वर्यसमेतो
जीवन्मुक्तः प्रवक्ष्यते योगी ।
योगानुभवमहामृत-
रसपानानन्दनिर्भरः सततम् ॥ ६३ ॥

इत्येवं प्रणवविधिः समीरितोऽयं
भक्त्या तं प्रभजति यो जपादिभेदैः ।
संप्राप्तोत्यनुततनित्यशुद्धबुद्धं
तद्विष्णोः परमतरं पदं नराग्न्यः ॥ ६४ ॥

इति श्रीमत्परमहंसपरिव्राजकाचार्यस्य
श्रीगोविन्दभगवत्पूज्यपादशिष्यस्य

श्रीमच्छंकरभगवतः कृतौ
प्रपञ्चसारे अष्टादशः पटलः ।

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SYMBOLISM OF OM (AUM)
AND THE
GAYATRI MANTRA

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"Verily beginninglessly BRAHMAN ALONE is OM. (The Word) is Shabda-Brahman (Brahman in the form of The Word). Om is the Vācaka (Designator) of Brahman. The whole Brahmāṇḍa (cosmic universe) is a projection of OM. Verily God, gods, and goddesses, and all life and all the Cosmic Universe is OM alone. There is nothing that exists outside its projection. Its further glory is this: the past, the present, the future -- everything is just OM. And whatever transcends the three divisions of time that too is just OM. For truly, everything is Brahman. And this Self within (Ātman) is Brahman."

--Rishi-Vāṇī (Words of the Rishis).

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SYMBOLISM OF OM (AUM)
AND THE
GAYATRI MANTRA

1. The total Existential Reality

OM or AUM is the most comprehensive, universal, non-personal, holy Sound-Symbol (LOGOS) and Designation (Vācaka of the SUPREME INFINITE DIVINE REALITY. This *Divine Reality* is of the nature of ANANTA-SAT-CIT-ĀNANDA (Absolute INFINITE-EXISTENCE-CONSCIOUSNESS-BLISS). It manifests as the *Totality of Existence* from the external-most Physical to the internal-most Spiritual-- on Four Cosmic Planes, *Macrocosmic* (Universal) as well as *Microcosmic* (Individual), viz.

1. The Gross or Physical;
2. The Subtle or Psychical;
3. The Potential or Causal; and
4. The Transcendental of Meta-Phenomenal, which is the Source of the first three.

The first Three Planes are represented on the Cosmic level, respectively, by:

1. Our external physical or empirical universe of sense-experience with its different types of life, such as microbes, plants, fishes and birds, animals, and human beings experienced while living through the Gross-body--designated BHŪḤ or BHŪR-LOKA;
2. The intermediate subtle regions with the Manes and other subtle invisible beings inhabiting them, which are apprehended psychically while living or through the Subtle-body after death--designated BHU-VAḤ or BHUVAR-LOKA;
3. The several heavens with the different types of angels and gods residing in them, including the Highest Heaven called the *Abode of Truth*

(SATYA-LOKA) where dwells the SUPREME CREATOR-GOD (BRAHMĀ), to be envisioned spiritually while living in *Samādhi* or Trance, or through the Spiritual-body after death--designated SVAḤ or SVAR-LOKA.

These *three planes* (TRI-Bhuvana) together constitute the entire phenomenal universe, called the BRAHMĀṆḌA. The Supreme being and Universal Oversoul of the entire *Brahmāṇḍa* and all its beings is designated PARAMA-ĪSHVARA (The SUPREME LORD AND RULER *Parama-Īshvara (Parameshvara)* rules this *Brahmāṇḍa*, divided into *fourteen cosmic worlds* (CHATURDASHA-BHUVANA-s or LOKA-S), from within (*Antaryāmin*) permeating it as its OVERSOUL. (PARAMĀTMAN).

Beyond the Phenomenal *Brahmāṇḍa* is the Noumenal, Non-Personal. Transcendental Absolute Spiritual REALITY designated BRAHMAN (THE INFINITE), which is *Supracorporeal*. Meta-physical, and beyond all Worlds and Heavens (LOKOTTARA). That is the FOURTH PLANE (TURIYA), *the Absolute* beyond all Time, Space, and Causation. *IT is pure infinite Spiritual Existence, and not any Region or Person*. All the other Three Planes are *Relative*. They are within time, space, and causation and rest on the Fourth, their Source, like a cinema-show on the screen without affecting IT. It is the ABSOLUTE BRAHMAN that appears as *Parameshvara* when associated with the *Brahmāṇḍa*, the entire Phenomenal Universe of the Three Planes.

II The Macrocosm and the Microcosm

THE MACROCOSM which is represented by all the above Four Cosmic Planes, and the MICROCOSM the individual unit which is a part of it, are built on the same plan, just as the fully manifested tree with its trunk and branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits, bears also seeds, each of which contains within itself the potentiality of manifesting a similar whole tree including similar seeds. Though the seeds are for the time being a very minor part of the tree, without any similarity to it, all the elements and ingredients of the whole tree are lying latent without every seed though invisible. Simi-

larly, each individual being or person, though apparently an insignificant part of the *Brahmāṇḍa*, contains the potentiality of the entire Four Planes of Existence of ANANTA-SAT-CHIT-ĀNANDA, which he or she can manifest in due course through spiritual efforts (*Sādhanā*) and final affinity and unity (*Yoga*) on each cosmic plane through identification with it. Hence, as a corollary to *Brahmāṇḍa*, the individual is called the *Pind-āṇḍa* (Āṇḍa means egg, which has the potentiality of reproducing its original source).

It will be interesting to note that from the Vedic literature onwards, in the Upanishads, the *Gītā*, and the later literature, the Supreme Divine Reality BRAHMAN is referred to as the Eternal Empyrean Source in which *the tree of the universe*, called ASHVATTHA (literally, 'that which will not last till tomorrow' that is everchanging and ephemeral), is rooted.¹ Sometimes the Divine Reality itself along with the universe is referred to as THE ETERNAL TREE, since the universe is rooted in IT (SAT-mūlāḥ saumya imāḥ sarvāḥ prajāḥ, Sat-āya, tanāḥ, Sat-pratiṣṭhāḥ--*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI. 8 . 4),² and continuously manifests from the Reality, like the waves in the ocean, while the Reality remains unseen. The *Kātha Upaniṣad* (VI. 1) says: "This is the Eternal *Ashvattha Tree* whose roots are above and whose branches spread below. That is verily the Pure. That is Brahman, and that is also called the Immortal. In That rest all the worlds, and none can transcend IT. Verily this is THAT." Cf. Also *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, III. 9:

"Rooted in His own glory He stands like a *Tree*. One without a second and immovable. By that Being the whole universe is filled." (*Vṛkṣa iva stabdho divi tiṣṭhati ekaḥ; tenedam pūrnam puruṣena sarvam*).

Gītā, XV. 1-3 says: They speak of an Eternal *Aśvattha* rooted above and branching below whose leaves are the Vedas....

It was stated above that whatever is in the Macrocosm in a fully developed form is also in the Microcosm potentially in the seed-form, though unseen. Conversely, we may also surmise that whatever latent intellectual and artistic faculties are manifested

and developed in the Microcosm in course of time or evolution are already present in the Macrocosm in a fully developed state, though ordinarily invisible to us.³ That is, we cannot comprehend them without proper mental equipment, training, and attuning ourselves to it. But the Yogi-s with disciplined and trained minds visualize them (Yogi-pratyakṣa), just as ordinarily we cannot see with bare eyes what the astronomers see about the far away galaxies, nebulae, etc. with the help of powerful telescopes. Cf. a) *Tad Viṣṇoḥ paramam padam sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ; divī-iva cakṣur ātatam--Rig-veda, I, 22-20; also b) Eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho ātmā na prakāśate; dṛśyate tu agrayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣma darśibhiḥ. Kātha Upanishad, III. 12.*⁴

On the Microcosmic level, in the individual person, the corresponding States of the Four Cosmic planes are:

1. The Gross or Physical-Body (Sthūla-Śarīra) of the Waking-State (*Jāgrat*), operative while living, which is an integral part of our entire physical universe of sense-perception (*Bhūh*);
2. The Subtle or Psychic-Body (*Sūkṣma-Śarīra*), experienced psychically and to some extent in the Dream-State (*Svapna*) which survives death of the Gross-Body and is an integral part of the Cosmic Psychic-Plane (*Bhuvah*);
3. The Potential of Causal-Body (*Kāraṇa-Śarīra*), experienced as the formless and objectless pure peaceful happiness in the dreamless Deep-Sleep-State (*Suṣupti*), when both the Gross-body and the Subtle-Body are held in abeyance, and which lasts till the real Self-Knowledge dawns. It is equivalent to the State of Involution (*Pratīśarga*) of *Brahmāṇḍa* when it returns by the reverse process into its Causal or Seed-State (*pralaya*) after billions of billions years. From that Seed-State again the Evolution (*Sarga*) of the next universe commences after a long period of dynamic rest, just as we commence our next day after sleep.

In the different categories of Spiritual States experienced in different types of Trances and *Samādhi-s*, when one envisions angels, gods, and the Supreme Personal Creator-God and has the intercourse with them, the Causal-Body, having been purified and rendered subtler and *transparent* (*Sāttvika*) by spiritual *Sāadhanā*, manifests as Spiritual-Body (*Sāttvika-Śarīra*) or Divinized-Body (*Bhāgavatī-Tanu*) which is an integral part of the Cosmic Heavens (*Svāh*).

These three are the Phenomenal States of the individual person, corresponding to the Phenomenal Universe. The Spiritual Entity within the person which endows the body with personality and consciousness, enabling it to get all the experiences of life in all the States, is called the JĪVA or JĪVĀTMAN (ANIMATING SOUL). Jīvātman is the lord and ruler of the body and controls and guides it from within, even as PARAM-ĀTMAN controls the universe from within.⁵

4. The Fourth Plane (*Turīya*) on the individual level is the Absolute ĀTMAN, corresponding to Absolute BRAHMAN realized only in *Nirvikalpa-Samādhi* (Transcendental trance when the mind merges in the SPIRIT, its Source beyond all manifested and potential corporeality. It is the ABSOLUTE ĀTMAN which appears as the JĪVA when associated with individual beings. The individual personality and life rest on the *Ātman* like the cinema-show on the screen without affecting IT. On this plane ĀTMAN is identical with BRAHMAN, since it is a plane beyond all phenomena, beyond *Brahmāṇḍa*, where there is no Time, Space, or Causation to bring about division or limitation in any manner in the *pure Infinite spiritual existence*.

Thus every individual contains all aspects of the whole of EXISTENCE, *from the grossest Physical to the subtlest Spiritual*, in a potential form. What is more, everyone can realize it with appropriate spiritual efforts (*Sāadhanā*). And the *Upāsanā* of OM is one of the chief and effective means of realizing it.

III. The OM as Auditory Symbol

OM is primarily an auditory or SOUND SYMBOL. It represents in a nutshell all the above Four Planes of the SUPREME INFINITE DIVINE REALITY, both Macrocosmically as well as Microcosmically, for purposes of meditation to help visualize and realize their unity in life. The symbolism is explained here briefly :--

All our experiences of entities and ideas in all the states of consciousness are represented by words, and words are made up of unit-sounds, such as are denoted by A to Z of the alphabet in English. With these sounds we form all our words and concepts. So A to Z can be in a way a symbol of the knowledge of the whole of Reality. For example, we say, "He knows from A to Z of a particular thing'. But the English Roman alphabet and its arrangement is casual and unscientific, and its pronunciation and use in words is erratic.

In Sanskrit [on the other hand] each unit sound is represented by a single definite letter and the pronunciation and spelling or name of the letter are the same. For example, in Sanskrit the consonant *K* with the vowel *a* added is pronounced as *Ka* and spelt also as *Ka* only; whereas in English we pronounce it as *Ka* [Ke?], but spell as *KayYe*. The Sanskrit alphabet is arranged in accordance with the order of the origination of sounds from the opening of the mouth passing through the throat from the larynx, and ending with the closing of the lips, by the contact of different parts of the mouth with the tongue. Between opening and closing of the mouth we produce all the words which represent all our experiences and concepts. When we open the mouth, we utter *A* (pronounced like *o* in *come* [why not say *a* in *again?*]) and when we close the lips we utter *M* (again like *m* in *come*).⁶ Thus between *A* and *M* are all the other sounds and words. Joining to them in the middle *U* (like *u* in *full*), which rolls through the throat over the whole tongue, we cover the entire beginning, middle and end of all words symbolically. In Sanskrit when *A* and *U* are combined, it gives us *O* sound as in *go*, and adding *M* to it we get the *OM*. Now the *A+U+M* known as the *Mātrās* (phonetic constituents) of *OM*, are symbolic not only of the beginning, middle and end of all the words, but of the Worlds (*Lokas*) as well for meditation purposes. They represent the three Planes of *Bhūh*, *Bhuvah*, and *Svah* and the corresponding Microcosmic States. When *OM* is utter-

ed mystically, the inarticulate humming sound that lingers (as after a gong is sounded), designated as the *Ardha-Mātrā* or *a-Mātra* (half or non-mora) known also as the *Anāhata dhvani*, represents the Absolute beyond the Worlds (*Lokottara*), the Fourth Plane (*Turīya*). Thus AUM is symbolic of entire EXISTENCE, Phenomenal as well as the Noumenal. Macrocosmic as well as Microcosmic, *Personal Īśvara* as well as *Impersonal Brahman*. Hence *OM* is considered as the designation of the INFINITE SUPREME DIVINE REALITY (*Tasya vācakaḥ Praṇavaḥ*) and is held to be the holiest universal NAME. Hence *OM* is also characterized as *Śabda-Brahman* SOUND BRAHMAN or *Brahman* in the form of SOUND OR THE WORD. *OM* being the Universal Cosmic Sound (the LOGOS), the totality of all sounds, it is also called PRANAVA (the primordial Reverberating Sound which fills the Universe), from which, modified as the *Ākāśa* (Space/Matter), the universe evolves in stages. Often 'OM TAT SAT' (*Om That Existence or Reality*) is uttered to indicate the transcendental aspect of Divine Existence. Cf. *Om-Tat-Sat iti nirdeśo Brahmaṇaḥ trividhaḥ smṛtaḥ--Gītā*, XVII. 23.

IV. The Om as Visual Symbol

AS WRITTEN in the Sanskrit *Deva-Nāgarī* script for ritualistic and auspicious purposes, the figure of OM (given at the beginning of the booklet) is also a graphic symbol. The curve below in the figure, represents the *Bhūr-Loka* (the Lower Gross Plane); the curve above, the *Bhuvā-Loka* (the Upper Subtle Plane), and the curve projecting from the middle, like the trunk of an elephant, the *Svar-Loka* (the Causal Plane), whence the *Logos* (*Praṇava*) issues forth reverberating as if from the trunk of an elephant. The small curve with the dot above the curved trunk, known as *Chandrabindu*, signifies the semi-nasal sound [*anunāsika*] as pronounced in Sanskrit. It represents inarticulate lingering sound after a gong is sounded and stands for the *Absolute* Words, and their concretized aspects Worlds, issue forth unceasingly from the *OM-kāra* (sound OM) like bubbles or waves in the sea.

This graphic symbol of OM was, in course of time, further concretized and personified for purposes of *Upāsana* into the figure of the Deity GAJĀNANA (The Ele-

phant Faced Deity--from *gaja*=elephant, *ānana*=face) or GANEŚA (the Lord of the *Bhūtagaṇa-s* or osmic Elements--from Īśa=Lord or Ruler of the [*bhūta*-element], *gaṇa* = group) with all the holy and auspicious attributes and functions that were associated with OM from the Vedic times transferred to Him. His figure is a philosophic symbol to which suitable mythology was later invented to explain His figure popularly. We shall not go into the details of this highly interesting profound cosmic symbolism here, but only hint at the fact that His pot-belly represents that the whole *Brahmānda* is within Him, and He stands transcending it. The similarity of the elephant-face and the figure of the OM is quite evident. He easily rides or controls the troublesome *Māyā*, represented by the mischievous mouse. All this is in keeping with the Hindu tradition of symbolically concretizing and personifying abstract entities as already mentioned. Gaṇeśa is often referred to as *OM-kāra-svarūpa* (of the form of *OM-kāra*). We may also note here that in the Hindu Pantheon all the Deities have animals as their vehicles, signifying divine powers controlling animal tendencies.

V. A U M and Spiritual Practice

TO HELP in spiritual Practice (*Upāsana*), A-U-M, the phonetic constituents of OM, are identified with different types of Cosmic Triads, from the theistic to the philosophic and the mystic, for meditation purposes as per the need and development of the aspirant.⁷

Further, OM being the PRAṆAVA (COSMIC-SOUND), the *Logos* in the Divine Mind where all the concepts of the universe and its entities, by the mystic repetition of the OM, one attunes oneself to the Cosmic Mind and is lifted up spiritually. By connecting oneself mentally to the cosmic reservoir through *Upāsana*, one's mind becomes a conduit for the flow of inspiration from the Cosmic Mind. Hence it is considered the holiest *Mantra* (Mystic Formula) for *japa* (sacred repetition), and is added at the beginning of all other *Mantra-s* used for *japa* as well.

Let us take two examples to see how the symbolism works psychologically :

1) The script we use for any language is nothing but an artificially contrived arbitrary device, a set of symbols to record sounds. Still it helps us to store knowledge in books. One who knows the language well and has learnt the particular script, to him is opened up all the knowledge stored in all the books in that language, though he may need the help of the learned. Similarly, if one knows the symbolism of OM, and all the ideas it represents, to him is opened up all the Divine knowledge, which he may realize with the help of *Guru*.

2) Suppose we have forgotten the name of a person about whom we want to communicate to a friend. We begin to give various details and descriptions; still it may not give an adequate or correct idea of the person. The friend's mind being in doubt, he does not feel any attraction to him. On the other hand, suppose we utter the name of a person, say Shri Ramakrishna. Immediately, in the mind of a person who has intimate knowledge about him, the cumulative effect of all his knowledge brings about a sense of love and reverence. Then, if the context needs, he may begin to recount all the details of that great life. Similarly, if a person has learnt all about the Infinite Supreme Divinity, and that OM is ITS designation, as soon as he utters OM all the greatness of that Divinity and ITS wonderful manifestations come to his mind in a cumulative way and uplift him. Then he may begin to contemplate on the details intensely and intimately, associating himself with IT. *This intimate intense contemplation is called UPĀSANĀ, which literally means 'sitting or placing oneself mentally near'* to the object of meditation. The psychological law is '*yat dhyāyati tat bhavati*' (whatever one meditates upon intensely that he becomes). The more one recalls the name of a person whom he loves, the nearer he feels to him, and more clearly he visualizes him. Similarly, the more one repeats OM with the requisite attitude, the more one recalls the Infinite Supreme Divinity, and feels close to IT. Ultimately he realizes his essential identification with IT, since he is, as we saw, potentially the microscopic counterpart of IT.

In ritualistic worship the identification of the macrocosm and microcosm is mentally visualized by a process called *Nyāsa* which consists of touching different parts of

the body while uttering the words of cosmic counterparts, and also in *Mānasa-Pūjā* or Mental-Worship, when symbolic identification is mentally contemplated.

VI. The Gāyatrī Mantra

THE GĀYATRĪ MANTRA is the greatest prayer-Mantra which incorporates all the ideas of the AUM-symbolism and prays to the Supreme Infinite Divinity Reality for the enlightenment of the intelligence (DHĪ) of all human beings to enable them to realize the Supreme Truth. It is also known as the SĀVITRĪ-MANTRA since it is addressed to the Divine Person in the SUN who is considered as the visible symbolic representation of the Supreme Divinity, for He destroys darkness and promotes life. (Cf. Īśa Upanishad, 15-16.) *Sāvitrī* is from *Savitṛ* (Savitā), which means the Source of Originator of Universe, as well as the Sun. *Sāvitrī-Mantra* occurs in the Vedas (*Rig Veda*) III. 62. 10), and is considered to be their very essence, or even their Mother (Gāyatrī Veda- Mātā). When later it was associated with OM, which is also considered as the source of the Vedas, and the *Gāyatrī* was treated as its elaboration, OM was prefixed to it along with the three *Vyāhṛtis* representing the Three Cosmic Planes, *Bhūr*, *Bhuvah*, *Svah* (Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, V. 14.1-8; *Chāndogya Upanishad*, II. 23. 2-3; III. 12.⁸ The *Gāyatrī-Mantra* in full repeated mystically, runs as follows:

OM BHŪR-BHUVAH-SVAH
TAT SAVITUR VAREṆYAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHĪMAHI
DHIYO YO NAḤ PRACODAYĀT.

"OM, We meditate on the Divine Spiritual Effulgence of That Absolute Supreme Infinite Divine Reality, the Source of the Three Phenomenal World-Planes--the Gross or Physical (*Bhūh*), the Subtle or Psychological (*Bhuvah*), and the Potential or Causal (*Svah*), both Macrocosmically (Externally) and Microcosmically (Internally). May That Supreme Divine Being stimulate our intelli-

gence so that we may realize the Supreme Truth.

The *Gāyatrī-Mantra* is the most universal, non-personal, holy prayer which can be used by any person belonging to any country, irrespective of race, religion, or sex. If one is a human being with intelligence that is qualification enough for repeating this *Prayer-Mantra*.

In course of time, just as the *OM-kāra* was personified into Gaṇeśa, the *Gāyatrī - Mantra* also was personified into the Goddess *Gāyatrī* (GĀYATRĪ DEVĪ) for purposes of *Upāsanā*. The following verse is repeated in adoration as a *Dhyāna-shloka* (Meditational verse):

Muktā-vidruma-hema-nīla-dhavala-cchāyair mukhaiḥ tryakṣaṇaiḥ
Yuktām indu-nibaddha-ratna-mukutām tattvārtha-varṇātmikām,
Gāyatrīm varadābhayāṅkuśa-kaśām śubhram kapālam gadām
Śankham cakram athāravinda-yugalam hastaiḥ vahantām bhaje.

(I adore the Goddess Gāyatrī, the embodiment of the *varṇa-s* (letters) signifying the Supreme Truth, with Her five benign faces reflecting the hues of pearls, corals, gold sapphire, and snow-each studded with three eyes representing omniscience), whose head is adorned with a jewelled crown created with the crescent-moon, whose two hands (out of ten) are in the pose of bestowing boons and fearlessness, and who in her other hands holds the goad, the whip, the white skull, the mace, the conch and the disc (as symbols of terror to the evil forces) and a pair of lotusses (as symbolizing purity, love, devotion, and detachment)"

(Cf. also *Devi-Māhātmya or Chandī* : 1, 73-74; Iṽ, 10)

VII. Importance of OM and the Gāyatrī

OM and the GĀYATRĪ-MANTRA have acquired such great importance that they are often referred to as THE PRANAVA and THE GĀYATRĪ. In the Vedas, Upa-

nishads, the *Gītā*, and the later literature, there are numerous references to the holiness, importance, and significance of the *Praṇava* and the *Gāyatrī*. The whole of the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* is devoted to the delineation of the spirituo-philosophical significance of OM. Though the Upanishad contains only twelve verses, it is considered so important that numerous commentaries are written on it. Shri Gauḍa-pādācārya, the grand-guru of Śaṅkarācārya, has written an extremely subtle and revolutionary philosophical work called the *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā* to elucidate the highest philosophy of this *Upanishad* which establishes the supremacy of the Non-dual Reality (ADVAITA). Śaṅkarācārya has commented on both the *Upanishad* and the *Kārikā*.

We shall give here a few of the important original quotations in translation from the Upanishads and the *Gītā* referring to the *Praṇava* and the *Gāyatrī*. It must be remembered that just as when we say Kriṣṇa or christ saves, it signifies the person behind the name. OM too signifies the Infinite Brahman. OM being ITS universal name (*Tasya vāchakaḥ Praṇavaḥ*).

1. KAṬHA UPANIṢAD : (1. 2. 15-17).

"The Goal which all Vedas proclaim, which all austerities and meditations (*Tap-āmsi*) seek, and desiring which the sages lead the life of *Brahmacharya* (Continence)--I tell it to thee in brief-- IT IS OM." (cf. *Gītā*, viii. 11).

"This Immortal WORD (LOGOS) is verily Brahmā (the Personal Creator-God). This Immortal WORD is verily also the Highest Brahman (Impersonal Divine Reality). Having understood this Immortal WORD, whatever one desires, one gets that."

"This Support (OM as a means of realizing Brahman) is the best: This Support is the Supreme. Knowing this Support (realizing the Truth Signified by OM) one is exalted in the world of Brahmā."

2. PRAŚNA UPANIṢAD : (The whole of section V. Some are quoted here-- V. 2-5-7).

"What is OM, O Satyakāma, is verily the Higher or Transcendental (impersonal) Brahman and the Lower or Phenomenal (Personal Creator-God) Brahmā. Therefore the Knower attains either of the two by this means."

"If one meditates upon only one of the three *Mātrā-s* (Moras) of OM, he comes back to this world very soon (after the death) being enlightened by that. The *Rik*-Hymns lead him to the world of Man, where he attains the greatness (in life) being endowed with Austerity (*Tapayā*). Contenance (*Brahmacarya*), and Faith (*Śraddhā*)."

"If again, one meditates upon two *Mātrā-s* one is united with the mind (after death). He is led to the World of the Moon (the Presiding Deity of mind) in the intermediate Region by the *yajus*-Formulas. And there in that World of Moon, having enjoyed its grandeur, comes back again."

"Again, he who meditates upon the *Supreme Puruśa (Paramēśvara)* with the Immortal Word OM, constituted of all the three *Mātrā-s* becomes united with the effulgent Sun. He is freed from all sins, even as a snake is freed from its slough. He is led to the world of Brahmā by the *Sāma*-chants. Then he beholds the Supreme Puruśa residing in the Heart, higher than this highest totality of *jīva-s* Brahmā or Hiranya-garbha."

"...Verily with this OM-kāra (the *a-Matrā*) as the support, the Knower attains what is peaceful, undecaying immortal, fearless, and Supreme (Ātman/Brahman)."

3. MUṆḌAKA UPANIṢAD: (II. 2. 3. 4, 6).

Taking as bow the mighty Upanishadic weapon, fix on it the arrow sharpened by constant meditation. And having drawn it to the full with the mind absorbed in It, the light, penetrate that MARK--the IMMORTAL BRAHMAN."

"PRAṆAVA (the mystic word OM) is the bow; the soul within, the arrow; and Brahman, the target. One should hit that mark with an undistracted mind, and like the arrow, become one with IT."

"Where all the arteries meet like the spokes of a chariot wheel in the hub--there within the psychic Heart He moves, becoming manifold. Meditate on that Self as OM. Godpeed to you in crossing to the farther shore beyond all darkness.

4. MĀṆḌŪKYA UPANISHAD : The entire upanishad is on OM, here briefly quoted :

"All this world is the immortal Word OM. Its further explanation is this: the past, the present, the future, everything is just OM. And whatever transcends, the three divisions of time--that too is just OM." (1)

"For verily, everything is Brahman. And this Self (Atman) within is Brahman. The Ātman has four quarters (aspects)--Waking, Dream, and Deep-sleep States of Consciousness, and *Turīya or Samādhi*, the Super-Conscious State" (2) "This Ātman is to be identified with OM, when OM is considered as a single complete WORD. When OM is considered as composed of parts, the aspects of the Ātman are to be identified with the parts, and the parts with the aspects. The parts of OM are A, U, M." (8) "The Immortal Word OM in its partless (i.e. inarticulate) aspect is the Fourth (*Turīya*)--the Transcendental, devoid of phenomenality, the Supreme Bliss, and Non-dual. Thus the WORD OM is verily the Self (Ātman). He who knows this, with his self (jīva) enters the SELF (ĀTMAN). (12).

5. TAITTRĪYA UPANIṢAD : (Whole of VIII *Anuvāka* in Chapter 1. briefly quoted here).

"One should contemplate : OM is Brahman : all this universe (perceived by the senses and intuited by the mind) is OM.... A *Brāhmaṇa* proceeding to recite the Veda intending 'Let me obtain the Veda' says OM. Assuredly he attains Brahman."

6. *CHĀNDOGYA UPANIṢAD* : (A few passages are quoted here. See also 1. 1. 8-9 ; IV. 17. 1-3).

"Now, that which is *Udgītha* is verily *Praṇava* and that which is *Praṇava* is *Udgītha*. The yonder Sun *Udgītha* and also *Praṇava*, for He moves along pronouncing OM' ." (1. 5.1).

"Prajāpati (the Vedic Lord of Creation) brooded (made *Tapas* or meditated) on the Worlds. From them, thus brooded, issued forth the threefold Veda (as their essence). He brooded on this. From this, thus brooded upon, issued forth the Mystic Syllables (*Vyāhṛti-s*) *Bhuḥ*, *Bhuvah*, and *Svah*. He brooded on them. From them, thus brooded upon, issued forth (as their essence) the Mystic Word OM. Just as all the parts of the leaf are permeated by the ribs of the leaf, so are all words permeated by the OM-kāra. Verily, the OM-kāra is all this--yea, the OM-kāra is verily all this." (II. 23. 2-3)

"*Gāyatrī* indeed is all this, whatever being exists. Speech indeed is *Gāyatrī* : for speech indeed sings and removes fear of all this that exists....Such is the greatness of this (*Gāyatrī*). The Supreme Cosmic person (*Puruṣa*) is even greater than this. All this World is a quarter of Him, the other three quarters of His constitute the Immortal Transcendent. (III. 12. 1-6 in brief).

7. *BṚHADĀRAṆYAKA UPANIṢAD* :

See Section V. 14. 1-8 and VI. 3. 6 for ritualistic and meditational application of GĀYATRĪ.

8. *ŚVETĀŚVATARA UPANIṢAD* : (1, 1, 4).

"Making one's own body the lower piece of wood (*Araṇi*) and the *Praṇava* the upper piece of wood (for purposes of rituals, fire is kindled by rubbing two pieces of holy wood or short sticks called *Araṇi-s*), [Visualize the churning of the milk to extract butter. The lower piece is quite large. The upper piece is just like the churning rod--Manthana-daṇḍa. note by mln.] and practicing churning in the form of meditation, one should realize the inherent Divine as one would find out something hidden like fire in the *Araṇi-s*."

9. *MAITRI UPANIṢAD* (Also called *Maitreyī* or *Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad*) (A few passages are quoted here. See also Section VI. 1, 4, 6, 8, 22-26, 34, 37; and VII. 6, 11).

"These two, the Spirit within and the Sun go forth toward each other. One should reverence them with the WORD OM, with the Mystic Utterances (*Vyāhṛti-s*) *Bhūr, Bhuvah, Svaḥ*, and with the *Sāvitrī (Gāyatī)* prayer."

"There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman: the formed and the formless. Now, that which is the formed is unreal; that which is the formless is real, is Brahman, is Light. That Light is the same as the Sun. Verily, that came to have OM as its Soul (Ātman). He divided Himself threefold. OM consists of three *Mātrā-s* (A + U + M). By means of these 'the whole World is woven warp and woof across Him.' For thus has it been said: 'One should absorb oneself meditating that the Sun is Om.'" (VI. 2-3).

Various Triads of the forms of the Ātman, worshipped by the use of the threefold OM.

"Now, it has elsewhere been said; A, U, M is the threefold form of the Ātman:

A, U, M (OM)	--- This is the Sound-form,
Feminine, masculine, and Neuter	--- This is the Sex-form
Fire, Wind, and Sun	--- This is Light-form
Brahmā, Rudra, and	--- This is the Lordship-form

Viṣṇu	
Gārhapatya, Dakshin- āgni, and Āhavanīya- Sacrificial Fires	--- This is the Mouth-form --- (Mouth of Gods)
Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sāma-Veda	--- This is Understanding- form
Bhūr, Bhuvaḥ, Svaḥ	--- This is World-form
Past, Present, Future	--- This is the Time-form
Breath, Fire, and Sun	--- This is the Heat-form
Food, Water, and Moon	--- This is the Swelling-form
Intellect, Mind, and Egoism	--- This is the Intelligence- form
Prāṇa, Apāna, and Vyāna Breaths	--- This is the Breath-form

Hence these are praised, honored, and included by saying OM. For thus it has been said : "This immortal WORD OM, verily, O Satyakāma, is both the Transcendental and phenomenal Brahma." ---(VI. 5).

*Worship of the Ātman in the form of the
Sun by the use of the Sāvitrī-prayer*

Tat Savitur Vareṇyam (That Adorable Splendour of That *Savitṛ* --the Originator of the Universe);

"Yonder Sun, verily is Savitar (a visible symbol); He verily is to be sought thus by one seeking Ātman'--say the expounders of Brahman.

Bhargo Devasya Dhīmahi (May we meditate upon That Splendour of the Divinity);

"Savitṛ, verily is the Divinity. Hence upon that which is called the Splendour do I meditate" -- say the expounders of Brahman.

Dhiyo yo naḥ Pracodayāt (And may He inspire our thoughts).

"Thoughts, verily, are meditations. And may He inspire these for us" -- say the expounders of Brahman.

(VI. 7 -- in part)

SEE ALSO *NRISIMHA-PŪRVA-TĀPINI* and *UTTARA-TĀPINĪ UPANISHADS*; and the *SĀ VITRĪ UPANISHAD*.

10. *THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ*.

Praṇavaḥ sarva-Vedeṣu-- 'I am the OM in all the Vedas' (VII. 8).

'Controlling all the senses, confining the mind in the Heart, drawing up the *Prāṇa-Vāyu* (though the *Sushumnā*) towards the head (*Sahasrāra*), and thus occupied in the practice of *yoga*, he who departs from the body uttering the one-syllabled "OM" denoting Brahman, and meditating on Me, attains the Supreme Goal.' (BII. 12-13).

'Pavitram-Om-Kāraḥ --"I am the Holy WORD OM"--(IX. 17).

'*OM TAT SAT*', this has been declared to be the triple designation of Brahman. By that were made of old the Brāhmaṇa-s, the Vedas, and the Yajñas. Therefore, uttering 'OM' are the acts of sacrifice, gift, and austerity, as enjoined in the ordinances, always begun by the followers of the Vedas. (XVII. 23-24).

(For the use of TAT (THAT Supreme reality) and SAT (Supreme Existence) see the verses XVII. 26-28).

MAHĀNĀRĀYAṆA UPANIṢAD ON
OM AND GĀYATRĪ

"The one-syllable 'OM' is *Brahman*. Agni is its Deity. Its Ṛṣi also is Brahman. Its metre is Gāyatrī, its application is for the union with *Paramātmān*. (Section XXXIII).

"May the Boon-conferring Divine Gāyatrī come to us (to instruct us about) the Imperishable Brahman who is revealed by the Vedānta. May Gāyatrī, the mother of Metre-s, favour us with the knowledge of the Supreme Brahman." (XXXIV).

'O Gāyatrī, Thou art the Vigour, Thou art the Stamina. Thou art the Strength, and Thou art the Brilliance in all. Thou art the origin and sustenance of Gods. Thou art the Universe and its duration. Thou art all that exist and that and their span of life. Thou surpasses everything. Thou art the TRUTH denoted by the *Praṇava*. I invoke Thee as Gāyatrī (Giver of Illumination); I invoke Thee as Sāvitrī (giver of life); I invoke Thee as Sarasvatī (Giver of Knowledge and Wisdom)....." (XXXV. 1).

"*OM Bhūḥ*, *OM Bhuvāḥ*, *OM Svaḥ* ; *OM mahāḥ* (the region of Spiritual Light) : *OM Janaḥ* (the place of Origin of Universe) ; *OM Tapaḥ* (the Region of Higher Knowledge); *OM Satyam* (the Abode of Truth). OM, May we meditate on Adorable Splendour of that Supreme Divine Source of all to quicken our understanding OM. It is the Causal Waters, Light, Bliss, Ambrosia, Brahman, and also the Three Worlds. All these are verily OM." (XXXV. 2).

Object of A U M *Turīya*

Meditation-----				

Reality	<i>Satyam</i>	<i>Jñānam</i>	<i>Anantam</i>	Brahman/Ātman
"	<i>Sat</i>	<i>Chit</i>	<i>Ānanda</i>	Brahman/Ātman
<i>Paramātman</i>	<i>Virāṭ</i>	<i>Hiraṇya- Garbha</i>	<i>Īśvara</i>	Brahman/Ātman
Trinity and Cosmic Functions and their Consort	Viṣṇu (Protection of Universe) (<i>Sthiti</i>) Lakṣmī	Śiva/Rudra (Involution of Universe) (<i>Pralaya</i>) Pārvatī/Kālī	Brahmā (Evolution of Universe) (<i>Śṛṣṭi</i>) Sarasvati	<i>Parameśvara</i> Non-dual/Peace <i>Śāntam-Advaitam</i> Devī or Parameśvarī
Functions Universe Body (<i>Śrīra</i>) Guṇa-s Power or Śakti	Wealth <i>Bhuḥ</i> Gross <i>Sthūla</i> <i>Sattva</i> <i>Prakṛti</i>	Power <i>Bhuvah</i> Subtle <i>Sukṣma</i> <i>Rajas</i> <i>Avyakta</i>	Wisdom <i>Svah</i> Causal <i>Kāraṇa</i> <i>Tamas</i> <i>Māyā</i>	<i>Lokottara</i> Incorporeal Ātman <i>Triguṇātīta</i> Brahman/Ātman
Framework of Universe States of Con- sciousness	Space <i>Jāgrat</i> (waking)	Time <i>Svapna</i> (Dream)	Causation <i>Suśupti</i> (Deep-sleep)	Transcendental Absolute <i>Samādhi (Turīya)</i> (Superconciou Trance)
<i>Samsāra</i> Vedas Sound	Rebirth Ṛg Vaikhatī	Life Yajur <i>Maghyamā</i>	Death Sāman <i>Paśyantī</i>	<i>Muktī</i> (Liberation) Aum <i>Parā</i>

8. As already pointed out, the sound OM is produced by the combination of the three sounds, A, U, M. These are the three *Mātās* (Moras or phonetic components) of OM; further there is the *Ardha-Mātrā*. (half-mora) or the inaudible sound which still lin-

gers even when the subtle sound dies away, and which can be detected only by fine perception and concentration.

OM being the sound symbol of Brahman, it is considered to be the first sound produced at the beginning of creation. From the three *Mātrās* of OM came out the three 'feet' of *Gāyatrī*. The *Sāvitrī Mantra* verses in *Gāyatrī* metre and the 'feet' refer to its parts. Since the verse has become very famous and holy, it has become well known as the *Gāyatrī*, just as *Gītā* means song; but since the Bhagavad-Gītā became very famous, it is referred to as *the Gītā*. And from its three 'feet' came out the three Vedas and the three *vyāhriti-s*. *Bhūr-Bhuvaḥ Svah*, representing the three Cosmic world-Planes. From *A*, came out '*Tat Savitar varenyam*', which expanded itself into the Ṛg-Veda and the Cosmic Plane, *Bhūḥ*; from *U*, '*Bhargo Devasya Dhīmahī*' which expanded itself into *Yajur-Veda* and the plane of *Bhuvaḥ* and from *M*, '*yo naḥ prachodayāt*', which expanded itself into *Sāma-Veda* and the plane of *Svah*. The first Veda is *Stuti para* (devoted to devotion), the Second is *Krīya para* (devoted to work), and the third is *Jñāna para* (devoted to knowledge).

So by the meditation upon the different *Mātrās* different ends attained according to the significations of the *Mātrās*. But when the mind is concentrated upon the *Ardha-Mātrās*, the transcendental Brahman is realized.

Appendix I

Sphoṭa, Om, and Nāda-Brahman

Brahmā or Hiraṇyagarbha or the Cosmic Mind first manifested as the name and then as form, i.e. as this universe. All this expressed sensible universe is the form behind which stands the eternal inexpressible SPHOṬA, the manifester as LOGOS or WORD. This eternal Sphoṭa, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe, nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *Sphoṭa* and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This *Sphoṭa* has one word as its only possible symbol and this is the OM. And as by no possible means of analysis can we separate the word from the idea this OM and the eternal *Sphoṭa* are inseparable, and therefore, it is out of this holiest of all holy words, the mother of the names and forms, the eternal OM, that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created.

But it may be said that, although thought and word are inseparable, yet as there may be various word-symbol for the same thought, it is not necessary that this particular word OM should be the word representative of the thought out of which the universe has become manifested.

To this objection we reply that this OM is the only possible symbol which covers the whole ground and there is none other like it. The *Sphoṭa* is the material of all words, yet it is not any definite word in its fully formed state. That is to say, if all the peculiarities which distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the *Sphoṭa*; therefore this Sphoṭa is called the *Nāda Brahman*, the *sound. Brahman*.

Vivekānanda
(Bhaktī-Yoga)

Appendix II

Vivekānanda on
Veda, Om, and the Universe

Veda is of the nature of *Śabda* or *idea*. It is but the sum total of ideas, is the Shabda, according to the old Vedic meaning of the term, in the subtle idea which reveals itself taking the gross form later on. So coming to the dissolution of the creation, the subtle seeds (ideas) of the future creation become involved in the Veda----supposing this jug breaks into pieces, does the idea of a jug becomes null and void? No, because, the jug is gross effect while the idea 'jug' is the subtle state, or the Shabda state of the jug, in the same way the *Śabda* state of every object is the Subtle state and the things we see, hear, touch or perceive in any manner, are the gross manifestation of entities in the subtle or *Śabda* state. Just as we may speak of the effect and its cause even when the whole creation is annihilated, the *Shabda*, as the consciousness of the universe or the subtle reality of all concrete things exists in Brahman as the cause. At the point of creative manifestation, this sum total of causal entities vibrates into activity as it were, and being the so-moment material substance of it all, the eternal, primal sound 'OM' continues to come out spontaneously. And then from the causal totality comes out first the subtle image, or Shabda-form, of each particular thing and then its gross manifestation. Now that causal *Śabda* or world consciousness is Brahman and it is the Veda." At the point of creation Brahman manifest as SHABDA (IDEA) and then assumes form Nāda or 'OM'. At the next stage the particular Shabdas or ideas that variously existed in former cycles such as Bhuḥ, Bhuvah, Svaḥ, cow, man etc. begin to come out of that 'OM'. As soon as these ideas appear in Brahman endowed with perfect will, the corresponding concrete things also appear, and gradually the diversified universe becomes manifest.

When the mind proceeds toward self-absorption in Brahman, it passes through all these stages one by one to reach the Absolute (*Nirvikalpa*) state at last. In the process of entering into *Samādhi*, first the universe appears as one mass of ideas; then the whole

thing loses itself in a profound 'OM'. Then even that melts away, even that seems to be between being and non-being that is the experience of the eternal NĀDA. And then the mind becomes lost in the Reality of Brahman, and then it is done.

All is PEACE

¹ In ordinary usage *Aśvattha* is a tree belonging to the fig variety. It grows up to a very huge size, but its berries are very small. Its leaves have long stalks and hence the leaves are constantly in movement with the slightest breeze, when other trees are still. [It is also called *Caladala*]. Probably this has earned it the name *Aśvattha* [?]. Consequently it has served as a symbol of religio/philosophical significance. It is also a very hardy tree and, like the ego, it is very difficult to eradicate. It grows anywhere, and even if a little of the root is left, it sprouts up again. Because of its religio/philosophical association, it is considered a holy tree, and is often seen in the villages with a platform around it with some holy images at its base. Being a huge spreading tree, the village meetings, schools, etc. are also held under the shade of the *Aśvattha* tree.

² "All these creatures, my dear, have *BEING* (SAT) as their *root*, have *BEING* as their *abode*, and have *BEING* as their *support*."

³ This is the idea underlying the concept of Adhiṣṭhāna-Devatas (Presiding deities), the Luminous (*Deva* from *Div*, to shine) Cosmic counterparts of the various faculties, arts, and sciences, etc. in the Hindu tradition and thought. These Luminous Devatās formless but conscious, like the mind, were later on endowed with concrete personified philosophic mythological forms for purposes of adoration and worship (*Upāsana*). This tendency to concretize and personify the abstract and the formless is uniquely special feature of Hindu tradition from the Vedic times to the present day in all fields of life especially in the religious and aesthetic fields. (Cf. the Seasons, and the Rāgas and Rāginis of music personified in art and painting). The Devatās were step by step raised higher and higher and ultimately identified with the *Ultimate Supreme Divine Reality*, of which they are but aspectual expressions.

⁴ -- (a) "The illumined Sages (*Sūryah*) constantly see that infinite All pervading Supreme Reality (Vishṇu) without any obstruction as though their vast eye (vision) was spread out in the Spiritual Sky."

(b) "This Ātman, hidden in the Hearts of all beings is not ordinarily revealed to all; but it is verily revealed to the subtle and pointed (concentrated) intellect of the Sages who are trained in perceiving subtle objects."

⁵ Just as the *Brahmāṇḍa* has Fourteen Cosmic Worlds or Lokas, the body also has correspondingly Fourteen Microcosmic Subtle Psychic Centres called CHAKRAS or LOTUSES, arranged along the spine at different levels, roughly indicated by the various plexuses. However, these *Chakras* are located in the subtle-body and six of them are well known as the *Shaṭ-Chakras*. Though the *Shaṭ-Chakras* are well known, there are other *Chakras* as well. See *The Serpent Power* by Sir John Woodroffe. V. S. Apte in his *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary*, quotes under the word *Nāḍī, Mālarī Mādḥava*, 5. 1.2: *Ṣaḍ adhika daśa nāḍī Chakramadhya sthitātmā*-- The Ātman abiding in the midst of the sixteen Nāḍī Chakras. When one's Psychic Energy (*Prāṇa Vāyu*) is raised along the central Psychic-Channel (*Suṣumnā Nāḍī*) in the spine (in the subtle body) from bottom upwards, through appropriate *Sādhanā* (Spiritual Practice) and attuned to any of these subtle Centres, one gets the corresponding Cosmic experience, just as when we tune the radio to different wave lengths, we get the programmes being broadcast from different places in the world on those wave lengths.

⁶ That is why we find babies everywhere use sounds like Ammā, Mum, etc. for mother. Hence Ammā or Ambā (*b* also being a labial, like *b* in *but*) is the most universal natural sound or name for the 'Divine Mother' or SHAKTI (DIVINE ENERGY), the source of all phenomenal Experience.

⁷. See the Appendix for the chart.

“-

Om: One God Universal
A Garland of Holy Offerings

* * * *

Tattvāloka

(Reality: The Light Eternal)

Special Number on Praṇava

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Shringeri

तत्त्वं जिज्ञासमानानां लोकानां प्रीतिमावहन् ।
तत्त्वालोको विजयतां शारदादयया सदा ॥

Tattvam jijñāsamānānām lokānām prītim āvahan.
Tattvāloko vijayatām Shāradādayayā sadā.

Bringing Bliss to those who aspire to realize the
Eternal Truth, may this *Tattvāloka* (Reality:
Light Eternal) triumph through the Grace of
Goddess Shāradā.



Preface¹⁸

Praṇava is so much in our evryday religious life and yet we know so little about it! This is because routine is the enemy of ratiocination. Is the habitual wearer of a precious diamond aware of its real worth, which far outweighs its size?

Om is the smallest and all-comprehensive symbol of the highest. It is ‘*anu*’ as well as ‘*bṛhat*.’ To contemplate on Praṇava is prayer, philosophy, yoga, and the merging of the self with the Self--*Brahmānubhava*. It is sound and silence!

This issue of *TATTVĀLOKA* presents Praṇava in almost every conceivable angle of view. It gives a fairly comprehensive picture of the mystic syllable that is the delight of the bhakta, the yogi, the tantric, the nāḍopāsaka, the jñānī. Om excludes none; includes all.

In this issue, saints and mystics comingle with philosophers, scholars and bhaktas to reveal to the readers the lustre of Praṇava which is like a gem with many facets.

The Vedas are the fountain-head of all dharma. The article Vedic Praṇava by Dr. Varadachari Sadagopan tells us of the comprehensive sweep of Praṇava in representing various scriptures and also how it confers on its Upāsakas the final beatitude. Om is known as the *mūla mantra* since it is recognized as the seed centre of all sound.

David Frawley, also known as Vamadeva Sastri, the name he adopted after a long and sustained study of the Vedas, seeks to correct some of the prevailing misconceptions among Western scholars about the antiquity of Praṇava.

He says that Om is the essence of the Vedas and the Vedic mantras going back to

¹⁸ Tattvāloka, Special Number on Praṇava, Vol. 18, no. 3, July-Aug. 1995.

the oldest Ṛg Veda itself.

As Upanishads follow the Vedas, V. R. Ganesan's article touches upon many Upanishads to bring out the glory of Om. He also emphasizes the need for the Sādhaka to understand the true import of Om so that the Sāadhanā will lead him to the goal.

Hareesh Raja, in his brief article, tells us how one can actually feel the vibration of Praṇava during a group chanting session.

The thrust of Sumitra M. Gautama is on how Ādi Śaṅkara's work "Pañcīkaraṇa" has much in it to commend itself to a Sādhaka with a scientific bent of mind.

Part two of the issue deals with Praṇava in relation to Shākta texts whereas its importance in the Vaiṣṇava Tradition is highlighted by Dr. Vanamala Parthasarathy.

The worshippers of Mother Goddess in her various aspects will gain much from the article "Pañca Praṇava," the five Praṇavas. Lovers of music, who are at the same time Praṇavopāsakas, will find Asha's article on Nāḍopāsana of particular interest.

Part Three presents the full text of the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad, a key Upanishad for the votaries of Praṇava, with a succinct introduction and meaning by Swami Lokeshvarananda.

While most Upanishads take recourse to stories for the exposition of abstract philosophical truths, the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad expounds its philosophy using the symbol of Praṇava. This is the speciality of this Upanishad which is found in the Atharva Veda.

In **Part Four** Swami Mukhyananda and B. Kutumba Rao deal with Om as a means of Sāadhanā. This section also contains a 12-page feature on the efforts of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham in reaching out to the United States to minister to the spiritual needs of devotees there.

For the first time in 1200 years, a new Foundation called the Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation has been established with the blessings of His Holiness Sri Bharati Tirtha Maha swamiji. The major emphasis of the Foundation is on educating the present-day youth in India's tradition and culture through annual summer camps.

K. S.



H. H. Sri Bharatitirtha Mahaswamigal

Jagadguru Blesses All Through

Praṇava

It is said that *Praṇava (Om)* is the essence of all the Vedas. The first letter 'A' in the *Ṛg Veda*, the middle letter 'U' in the *Yajur Veda* and the last letter 'M' in the *Atharva Veda* have combined to form Aum (*Om*).

The Māṇḍūkya Upanishad says, *Omityedaksharam idam saTyam* [?]. It means that all the worlds are entirely permeated by *Om*. That is why *Om* denotes the Parabrahman and is also the most appropriate means to know about it. In this context, the *Upanishads* have given several ways of *Praṇava Upāsanā*.

The *Śāstras* say that it is essential for *sannyāsins* to take to *Praṇava Upāsanā*; in fact, no other practice is required for them. The *Mantra Śāstra* says that every *mantra* should start with *Om*. It is also customary to chant *Om* loud and clear in order to quieten the mind.

Ādi Śāṅkara Bhagavatpāda has elaborately explained *Praṇava* in various texts. Essentially, his work on *Panchīkaraṇa* is an annotation on *Praṇava*. Indeed, *Śāstras* tell us

that *Praṇava* is an auspicious symbol. It is therefore necessary that all people should learn more about *Praṇava* which has been extolled not merely by the Vedas and Śāstras, but also by all saints and sages in India.

Om̐kāraś cāthaśabdaś ca dvāvetau Brahmaṇaḥ purā.
Kaṇṭham bhittvā viniryātau tasmān māṅgalikāvubhau.

The two sounds, "Om̐kāra" and "Atha" were uttered originally by Brahmā.
Hence both are auspicious.

Part One

Vedic Praṇava

The Brahma Praṇava represents all the Vedas,
Upanishads and scriptures and is the
bestower of the final beatitude.



The mysteries of Om saluted as the Vedic Praṇava, are defined and described in the *Yajur Veda*, *Chāndogya*, *Praśna*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Katha*, *Brahma*, *Tāra Sāra*, *Mahā-Nārāyaṇa*, *Nārada Parivrājaka* and *Paramahaṃsa Parivrājaka Upanishads*, *Tantra Sāra*, *Dattātreya Tantra Saṃhitā*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* and *Pātāñjala Yoga sūtras*.

Some of them point the way to realise Brahman (Supreme Reality) through meditation on Om, the sacred syllable. Praṇava serves as the prime verbal symbol that links the reciter to the one to whom it is directed (Brahman).

When one splits Aum according to the rules of Vedic Niruktam (etymological interpretation), its three components (A, U, M) become words and symbols with individual meaning.

The *Sarva Sāra Saṅgraha* states that one who understands the full meaning of Praṇava in the above manner becomes a Vedavit or the knower of the Vedas.

The Purāṇas state that the precocious Vedavit, Lord Subrahmaṇya, explained the true meaning of Praṇava to his father and thereby earned the name of Svāmināthan.

Om is also known as the *mūla mantra*, since it is recognised as the seed centre of all sound, just as the point (Bindu) is recognised as the fundamental unit of vision. Besides being the essence of all the *mantras*, Praṇava almost always precedes the extended *mantras*, such as *Gāyatrī*, *Aṣṭākṣarī*, *Rudra* and *Haṃsa mantras* and is seen at the very

front of Vedic passages, such as *Śānti Pātham*.

Aum is understood to protect the universe and all of its living beings. This role of Praṇava makes all the living beings bow before the Supreme Lord. *Prāṇān sarvān Parātmani praṇamayati iti Praṇavam* [?] is thus the definition of the word Praṇava. Praṇava is also known as the Brahma Vidyā Mantram. In this context, it is recognised as the Mantra that leads the Sādhakas (aspirants) to the other shore of *saṃsāra*.

Sanction for Pranava

The Śrutis (Vedas and Upanishads) salute the Praṇava and explain its extraordinary significance. The last verse of the *Yajur Veda* comments on the significance of Praṇava as follows: "O, men, by me, the resplendent protector, the matter, the face of the eternal cause, is protected. The spirit yonder is the Sun, that spirit dwelling inside the Sun is me. I am vast like the atmosphere, greatest of all in merit, action and nature. Om is my name."

A *mantra* of the *Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad* echoes the above *Yajur Veda mantra* revealing that the indweller of the Sun is Brahman, who is worshipped as Praṇava. It says: "Āditya, the supreme cause of this universe, is denoted by the syllable Om. That form of Sun is Brahman. That is the pervading cause of all. That is water, fire, flavour and ambrosia (immortality). The three Vyāhritis (Bhūr, Bhuvaḥ, and Suvaḥ) representing the three worlds and the Praṇava representing the cause of the universe denote Brahman."

The *Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad* states elsewhere directly that the one syllable Om is Brahman. It also reveals that the Praṇava is recited and reflected upon to achieve union with the Brahman, who exists as the manifold universe. Yet another *mantra* of this Upanishad points out that the addition of Om at the head of the *Gāyatrī mantra* represents Brahman in all of his [?] three aspects as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, responsible for the creation, protection and the dissolution of the universe.

Praśna Upanishad points out that Om is recommended for the meditation on and the worship of the Supreme Reality in its Saguṇa Brahman form with attributes and the Nirguṇa Brahman form without attributes. In a *Kathopaniṣad mantra*, the Lord of Death (Yama) reveals to the aspirant Nachiketā that "this word (Om) is verily Brahman, this word is verily the highest, he who knows this word obtains, verily, whatever he desires."

A passage in the *Bhriguvalī* of the *Taittirīya Upanishad* explains to us the benefits accrued from recognising and worshipping Om as Brahman. It says: "Let him (the aspirant) meditate on the supreme (Om) as the support; he becomes well supported. Let him worship Brahman (Om) as great; he becomes great. Let him worship it as mind; he becomes thoughtful. Let him worship it as *namaḥ* (obeisance); to him all desires shall

come to pay homage. Let him meditate upon that as the supreme; he comes to supremacy in life."

It is for these reasons, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* points out again that the Praṇava is identical to Brahman and should be worshipped as Brahman. In the fourth Anuvāka of *Śikshā Vallī* of the *Taittirīya Upanishad*, Om is pointed out as the most sacred *mantra* for the aspirant to illuminate all his faculties including his own intellect (*medhā śakti*). Praṇava is recognised here as the sheath of Brahman and the invocation of Om is declared to be the equivalent of the invocation of the Brahman.

Four-Fold Brahman

The syllable Om has a four-fold character. The *Nṛsiṃha Uttara Tāpinī Upanishad* explains how this four-fold Vyashti (constituent parts) forms the Samashti (the whole). A, U, M and the *ardha mātrā* (half letter) at the end of the sacred syllable represent the four constituents of Praṇava.

The letter 'A' represents the terrestrial world constituted by the seven continents surrounded by the seven seas according to this Upanishad. 'A' represents the *Ṛg Veda*. The Gārhapatya Agni (householder's fire) is its Agni. The letter 'U' represents the *Yajur Veda* and the intermediary world. Dakṣiṇāgni is its fire. The letter 'M' represents the celestial world and the *Sama Veda*. Its fire is the Āhavanīyāgni [Āhavanīyāgni?]. The half letter or the nasalisation at the end of the three letters represents the lunar world and the *Atharva Veda*. The Ekarshi fire of the Atharva ritual is its fire.

In the Samashti form, Praṇava thus contains all the four Vedas and their immortal hymns from which the Brahman, the truth symbolised by the sound Om, arises.

Structure of Praṇava

The eight-fold structure of "the savior *mantra* that ends the course of worldly life" is explained by Brahmā (the creator) to his son Nārada in the *Nārada Parivrājaka Upanishad*.

Lord Brahmā says: "Om is Brahman. Know that the Om, consisting of one syllable, is Antaḥpraṇava. It is divided into eight *mātrās*--the vowel 'A,' the vowel 'U,' the consonant 'M,' the half syllable (*ardha mātrā*), the sound Nāda, the point Bindu, the time duration Kāla and the energy Śakti. Hence it is not four."

⊙

Lord Brahmā goes on further to explain Virāt Praṇava consisting of 16 matras. 'A, U, M' and the half letter are the first four subdivisions; the Bindu, Nāda, Kāla and Kālātīta (resonance with time) are the next four sub-divisions; Shānti (tranquillity), Shāntyatīta

(beyond tranquillity), Unmanī (state of absence of gross mind), Manonmanī (state of absence of subtle mind) are the subsequent divisions bringing it to twelve. The final four divisions of Virāt Praṇava are Purī, Madhyamā, Paśyantī and Parā associated with the formation of speech.

Brahma Deva states: "This Brahma Praṇava is composed of all the scriptures, Vedas and all the Upanishads; this Om should be sought by everyone; know that it is the beginning of everything and the bestower of the final beatitude."

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The Basis of All Syllables



Om, the all comprehensive sound symbol of Brahman, represents the manifested state of Brahman by its audible sound and the unmanifested state by its inaudible form.

The mystic syllable Om consists of three Sanskrit letters A, U and M. Among the letters the vowels are the more important ones and among the vowels the letter 'a' is most important.

Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*, *aksharāṇām akāro'smi* (I am the sound 'a' (*akāra*) among the letters).

The letter 'a' (as also the other vowels) is pronounced without any friction caused between the parts of the speech organs. Hence it is pure. It is the first among the vowels and it is the ending sound of the majority of the masculine nouns in Sanskrit.

From the linguistic point of view also, it is important since it is a front vowel and the easiest to pronounce. The vowel 'u' can be taken as representative of the feminine words as words like 'dhenu' end with the sound 'u' (though the majority of the feminine gender words in Sanskrit end with long 'ā' or long 'ī' sound).

The sound 'm' is representative of the neuter nouns in Sanskrit as most of the neuter gender words like 'jalam' and 'phalam' end with the sound 'm'.

Thus, the syllable Om (Aum), representing all the words, is the basis of Sanskrit language itself. Om can be taken to mean the entire range of sound phenomena since 'a' represents the front vowel, 'u' is the end vowel, and 'm' is the nasal sound.

Expanding the function of Om, it can be taken to represent all the words that can be produced. Since all things of the world possessing names and forms are denoted by words and since Om stands for all the words, we may say that Om pervades all words and things. The entire universe is *śabdabrahmāmaka*. Om is therefore the basis of the entire universe.

The entire universe is but the manifestation of the Brahman.

However, a person resorting to Yogic practice should first combine the Yoga relating to the qualified Brahman with the *svara* of the mystic syllable Om. Then, one should go beyond the *svara* and concentrate on Om without the *svara*. One should go even beyond that and concentrate on the non-qualified Brahman with which is identified Om.

Dr. S. Ramaratnam

Om and the Ṛg Veda

David Frawley

While Om is not mentioned specifically in the Ṛg Veda, the Upanishads refer to the Ṛg Veda as the basis of Om. There is throughout this Veda an emphasis on the Mantra as the power whereby the gods are revealed.



We are told by the modern Western scholars of the Vedas that the sacred syllable Om was not known or used in the time of the *Ṛg Veda* because it was not found anywhere in the text. We are told it only became important at the later time of the *Brāhmaṇas* and Upanishads, wherein it first appears in the literature.

This is typical of an approach to the Veda which only recognizes what is evident or superficial. Yet the Veda is a mystic text and was not intended to give every aspect of the knowledge of the seers in an evident form. While we do not find Om mentioned specifically in the *Ṛg Veda*, there is throughout the work an emphasis on the sacred word or chant, the *mantra* as the power whereby the gods are revealed. The sacred word could very well have been Om. Let us see how later texts indicate that it was.

The Upanishads state:

‘Who is the bull of the chants, possessing all forms, who from the immortal chants was born, may, that Indra deliver me with wisdom.’ [Yaś chandasām ṛṣabho viśvarūpo chandobhyosa mendro medhayā]

Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 1.4.1.

The “bull of the chants” is Om. It is identical with Indra, the foremost of the Vedic gods. Indra in the *Ṛg Veda* conquers the power of darkness with the divine word or Brahman. Om is also called Brahman, being Shabda Brahman or the sound Brahman.

A famous verse of Vāmadeva from the *Ṛg Veda* (4.58.2) quoted in the Upanishads, describes the “bull of the chants” as

“Four are [his?] horns, three are his feet, two are his heads and seven are his hands. Bound threefold the bull roars, the mighty God has entered into mortals.” [Catvāri śṛṅgā...] Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad. 9.1.

This is said by the various commentators like Sāyaṇa to be an explication of Om.

Om in the Upanishads is said to have four quarters, referring to the four states of waking (*jāgrat*), dream (*svapna*), deep sleep (*suṣupti*), and pure consciousness (*turīya*).

Prime Legend

According to the *Upanishads* (*Chāndogya Upanishad* 1.4.1) the Sun chants Om. The prime legend of the *Ṛg Veda* is the resurrection of the sun out of darkness by the seers and the gods by the power of the Vedic chants. It occurs through the fourth Brahman.

By the fourth Brahman, the sage Atri found the secret Sun that was hidden by darkness.

Ṛg Veda 5. 40. 6.

This Sun is Om and its fourth quarter in which the divine light is delivered out of darkness is its fourth state (*turīya*), the state of pure consciousness transcending the three lower states of waking, dream and deep sleep. The Sun that the Vedic seers make rise in heaven is the Sun of Truth, the divine syllable Om.

Dīrghatamas states in the *Ṛg Veda* (I.164.39):

"The sacred syllable of the chant in the supreme ether in which all the gods reside; he who does not know that, what can he do with the Veda!"

That sacred syllable on which the Vedas rest is Om.

Other names of Om occur in the *Ṛg Veda*. Om in the Upanishads is also called "Udgita [Udgītha?]," which is composed of the root "ga" meaning "to move" or "to sing," to which the preface "ut," meaning "up" has been added. Hence it means the higher singing or upward movement, the highest point of the chant. This term occurs first in the *Ṛg Veda* (X.67.3) in a verse which states:

'Brihaspati roared forth the light and he gave the prior affirmation and as the knower he moved upwards.'

This comes from a hymn of Ayasya Angirasa. Both this seer and Brihaspati are associated in the Upanishads (*Chhandogya Upanishad* 1.2.10-11 and also *Brihadāraṇyaka*) with Om and Udgita. Hence the Upanishads refer to the *Ṛg Veda* as the basis of Om.

The same Vedic hymn states (X.67.1.2):

'This thought, possessing seven heads, vast and born from truth, our father found. This certain fourth that generates all things, Ayasya [Ayāsyā?] declared as the hymn to Indra.'

'Declaring the truth, meditating straight, the sons of Heaven, the heroes of the almighty, the Angirasa seers, holding the station of sages, meditated out the original nature of the sacrifice.'

This thought which measures out the sacrifice is obviously Om. The central Vedic chant is the Gāyatrī *mantra* to the Sun God as Savitar, the divine power of aspiration. This chant comes from three Vedic verses (*Ṛg Veda* III.62.10-12). Around it is formed the chants to the worlds (lokas) with the chant Om as the basis (*Om Bhūr Bhuvā Svah Om*). Om probably occurred even in the *Ṛg Veda* behind this chant as its central seed syllable.

If Om is the central *mantra* of the Vedas from the beginning, one may ask, why is it not mentioned in the earlier literature? For one thing, no seed syllables or *bīja* mantras occur in the Vedic hymns. They are, however, quite evident from the nature of Vedic words which remain closely related to their original roots. Such a seed language was the basis of the Vedic language and is implicit in its form and structure. Certainly a language which everywhere espouses the *mantra* and looks back to prime roots had its seed syllables also. These were part of the background of the hymns.

Om is the essence of the Vedas and the Vedic *mantras* going back to the oldest *Ṛg Veda* itself. Those who fail to see this fail to understand the Veda and are not capable of discerning its inner meaning. Those who recognise Om gain the key to all Vedic knowledge, whether they learn the Vedas or not.

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Supremacy of Om

The various mathematical versions of the chant and the sacrifice in the *R̥g Veda* are the various levels of vibration of Om. The seven seers are the seven energies of Om. Indra is the power of Om. The Sun is the light of Om. The *Sāma Veda* is the song of the Sun or equality which is Om. Om is the prime *mantra* of the Vedas from the beginning to the middle and end. Through it the essence of Vedic knowledge can be gained. Om is the Vedic Brahman or divine word which is the Upanishadic Brahman or cosmic reality. Through Om the Soma bliss of immortality flows.

Need for Guru

For the realisation of the Atman, the spiritual aspirant should reverentially approach the *guru*, who is established in Brahman and who is well versed in the scriptures. This is possible only when he knows the ephemerality of the material world and feels disgust for the world which is the result of the accumulated karmas of beings.

The *guru* transmits his realisation through clear instruction and an exemplary life to the spiritual aspirant who is endowed with a high degree of renunciation and discrimination, who is calm, and whose mind is set on God.

Muṇḍaka Upanishad.

Praṇava in Upanishads

**The Sādhaka, on realising the all-pervading Omkāra
grieves no more and is freed from saṃsāra,
the cycle of births and deaths**



Meditation is one of the basic practices in the path of spiritual development. In the beginning stages this is sought to be achieved through directing the attention on a symbol, which may be a form of God or Goddess of one's own choice (*Ishta Devatā*), or on sun, moon, lamp, etc. or on the syllable Om.

Om, otherwise known as Praṇava, is the simplest of symbols, but is regarded as the most powerful. It is taken up for meditation usually by *sannyāsins*. Om symbolises all of sound and hence all speech. The *Chāndogya Upanishad* says, "As by the fibres the leaves are pervaded, so by Om is pervaded all speech."

Om is also the essence of all Vedas. Once when Brahmā (the Creator) was requested to state the essence of the Vedas briefly, he said the *Gāyatrī mantra* is the essence; but on being told that even this *mantra* is too long to help in meditation, Brahmā stated that Om is the essence of all the Vedas.

Om which is the imperishable Brahman is all this (universe). All this belonging to the past, present and the future is Omkāra only and anything else beyond time is also Omkāra only, says the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*.

Om or Omkāra is extolled in several other Upanishads also in various ways. The meaning of Praṇava (Omkāra) is thus based on Vedic traditional knowledge and is an aid to the ascertainment of the reality of the Self.

Nachiketa, the student in *Kathopanishad*, asks Yama (the teacher) to tell him of that thing which is beyond *dharma* and *adharma*, which is different from cause and effect and which is different from past and future.

In answer to this question, Yama points to the Oṃkāra in these words--"It is that which all the Vedas affirm with one voice, that which is implicit in all austerities, that, desiring the attainment of which people practice a life of continence and service (Brahmacharya). Briefly it is Om."

Yama further proceeds to make a distinction between *Saguṇa* (the one with attributes) and *Nirguṇa* (the one without attributes) aspects of the syllable Om. He says that Om is the syllable which represents both the Para Brahman (the supreme Brahman) and the Apra Brahman (the inferior Brahman, i.e. *Hiraṇyagarbha* with attributes). One who knows can choose between the two and attain to that which he wants. Yama also says that Om is the best medium (*ālambanam*) to attain Para Brahman or Apra Brahman and one who meditates on this *ālambanam* becomes adorable like Brahman.

Ādi Śaṅkara while commenting on this *mantra* of *Kathopanishad*, says that Yama has indicated both the superior and inferior Brahman to aspirants, but the former is the answer to Nachiketa's question.

The significance here is that one who does *upāsana* on Brahman with attributes can have Om as symbol and attain Brahma Loka. For the one who has realised, Om represents knowledge of Brahman. He attains *mukti*.

The *Praśna Upanishad* also talks about *Praṇava* as Brahman, both conditioned (with attributes) and unconditioned (without attributes). *Satyakāma* asks his teacher, the venerable *Pippalāda*, the question (5th *Praśna*), "What would be the reward of a person after death if he meditates upon the syllable Om all his life?"

The teacher says: *Vidvān etena āyatanena eva ekataram anveti*,--the one who knows attains either of the two--superior or inferior Brahman--by this means alone. In other words, this is a means for the attainment of the Self, this meditation on Om. Om is the nearest symbol of Brahman.

But the teacher also warns that the syllable Om when not fully understood does not lead one beyond mortality; he will be born again on this earth. When meditation is rightly directed with full understanding of the *Praṇava*, a man is freed from fear and attains to Brahman. All This ??

The Taittiriya Upanishad says that one should meditate knowing that "Om as a word is Brahman," for Om is all this, meaning that this sound permeates everything. Since all that is nameable is dependent on names, all is Om.

The Upanishad further goes on to praise Om in these words: Om is the word for "Anukritih," for concurrence or approval. Om is recited to the gods. The *udgātā* commences singing samans with Om. They recite the Śastras beginning with "Om Śom." The *Adhavaryu* (priest) encourages by the word 'Om.' (The Supervising Priest) Brahmā approves with the word 'Om.' In Agnihotra sacrifice he gives permission for the sacrifice by uttering the word 'Om.'

The Brāhmaṇa takes refuge in Om for the sake of study and before starting the chanting of the Vedas he utters 'Om' with the idea that he shall attain Brahman, and the Upanishad confirms that by this, he does verily attain Brahman.

Ādi Śaṅkara in commenting on this *mantra* says that the substance of all this practice of Om is that "since all activities that are undertaken with the utterance of Om become fruitful, Om should be meditated upon as Brahman."

The *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* and *Kaivalya Upanishad* refer to meditation on Praṇava in almost similar terms.

An Analogy

In olden times when sacrificial fire was to be lit up, fire was produced first by rubbing together two pieces of wood called *araṇis*. Using this analogy, the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* says that the body should be taken as the lower *araṇi* and the Praṇava (Om) as the upper *araṇi*. The mind should then contemplate on the meaning of 'Om' as the upper *araṇi*. The contemplation is compared to the churning of the two *araṇis* indicating that meditation should be thorough and uninterrupted. Then just as the fire hidden in the *araṇis* comes out of the wood, the reality of the Self would become evident through continuous practice.

Gauḍapāda in his *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* concludes his analysis of Praṇava by restating the meaning and emphasising the importance of meditation on Om. In verse 25, he says that Omkāra is fearless Brahman: One should fix his mind on Omkāra. For one who is ever established in Omkāra, there is no fear from anywhere.

In verse 26, after stating that Oṃkāra is both Apra Brahman and Para Brahman, he says that Oṃkāra is without cause and effect, without inside or outside and is without decay.

In verse 27, he says that Oṃkāra is indeed the beginning, middle and end of all. One who knows Oṃkāra in this way attains to that Brahman.

In verse 28, he says that Oṃkāra is indeed the Īsvara present in the heart of all and is to be known as such. Having thus known Oṃkāra which is all pervading he grieves no more; he is freed from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths.

Verse 28 is as follows:

Praṇavam hīśvaram vidyāt sarvasya hṛdi saṃsthitam.

Sarvavyāpinam Oṃkāram matvā dhīro na śochate.

(Om)

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Praṇava in Sectarian Upanishads



The sectarian Upanishads, a sub-cult of the minor Upanishads, are linked to Shaiva, Vaishṇava or Shākta worship, but some of them contain references to Praṇava. The *Atharvashikopanishad*, a part of the Atharva Veda, deals extensively with Praṇava. The Upanishad is divided into three parts.

The first part is devoted to meditation upon the Praṇava, its four quarters and four mātrās. The second part is devoted to a comparison of the Praṇava to Tāraka, Viṣṇu and Brahmā. The third section compares the first three mātrās of Praṇava to *jāgrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti*.

Since it is a Shaivaita Upanishad, it exhorts meditation upon Shiva, and declares that knowledge of Omkāra will bestow upon one the fruits of yoga and Jñāna. The Kaivalyopanishad also deals with the meditation upon Praṇava as a means of release. It also says that the realised man is Praṇava.

Both the *Pūrvā* and *Uttara Nṛsīṃhatāpinī* Upanishads deal in depth about Om. While the former explores the waking, dream and causal states, and declares that Praṇava is the past, present and future, the latter also adds that A, U and M are identified with the *Anuṣṭubh mantra*.

The *Tripada-vibhūti-mahānārāyaṇopanishad* says that "Brahman is of the form of Praṇava," and "Brahman is explained by the word Praṇava."

In the *Sītōpanishad*, Bhūdevī, as Praṇava, is in the form of the earth, with seven Dvīpas in the waters, and as the base of 14 lokas--Bhūloka, Bhuvārloka, Svarloka, Maharloka, Janaloka, Tapoloka, Satyaloka, Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Rasātala, Talātala, Mahātala and Pātāla.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtra* says "Repetition of Praṇava and reflection upon its meaning is Japa.'

In the *Akshamālikopanishad*, it is said that one of the vital necessities in the purification of the rosary is the recitation of Praṇava throughout its ritual--cleansing with various products.

The *Bṛhajjābālopanishad* prescribes that ashes ought to be smeared upon the body only with the recitation of the Praṇava. No other mantra is required.

The *Vāsudevopaniṣad* says that the *Tripuṇḍra* on the forehead is indicative, among ether trinities, of the Akāra, Ukāra and Makāra of Praṇava, and should be applied accompanied by the recitation of the same mantra.

Sumitra M. Gautama

Chaitanya Praṇava

Hareesh Raja

The author dwells on the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gītā, the Yoga Sūtras and Purāṇas to highlight the glory of Om and suggests a way to directly experience the creative vibrations.



Our sages have conveyed to us that, "the universe was created out of the divine sound of Om." Modern day scientists have now come out with the Big Bang theory which says that this universe was created out of a big bang or explosion.

The Vedas are among the oldest scriptures known to the human race. They are *apauruṣeya* or works of divine origin, beyond the perception of mere men, and the prefix of each verse (*mantra*) is the Praṇava or the sound of Om.

The word Om consists of the vowels A plus U and the nasal sound of M. The intonation of Aum (Om) extends to three *mātrās*. A *mātrā* is one beat of rhythm. Thus when the character AUM is transcribed in the Sanskrit alphabet, it is written as AU3M. In order to understand this time factor of the *mātrās*, it is necessary to know the system of Vedic composition.

The Vedic hymns of the ancient past combine the flow of meaningful words into a poetic metre as also a musical system of incantation, indicated by punctuation signs. A letter with no sign is *svarita*, indicating the basic pitch or note of the chant. A horizontal line below the letter is *anudātta* indicating one pitch lower than the basic note, while a

vertical line above the letter is *udātta* or one *svara* above the basic note. This goes to show that most Vedic incantation is composed in three notes of the musical scale.

Apart from these three notes, there are time signs: two vertical lines above a letter is *pluta* which indicates that the tone of the letter has to be elongated by one beat. When the tone has to be extended by more than one beat, the time of *pluta* is indicated by a numerical figure after the letter. Thus we have Au3m for Aum

The Gāyatrī Mantra

The Praṇava is associated with the *Gāyatrī mantra*. This is the one and only verse which is common to all the four Vedas. What is more, every follower of Vedic teachings recites the *Gāyatrī mantra* in the course of his daily prayers. This mantra of 24 syllables seeks the guidance of the divine entity in one's thoughts and deeds. Thus the Praṇava is accepted as the divine entity.

Praṇava in Upanishads

The sages of the ancient past, who studied, digested and meditated upon the Vedic texts composed the Upanishads, which explain the philosophical aspect of Vedanta. There are more than a hundred Upanishads.

One such Upanishad, which extols the Praṇava is the *Maṇḍūkya Upanishad*. Besides, there are references to the Praṇava in various other Upanishads.

Praṇava in the Gītā

The *Bhagavad Gītā* has been described as an Upanishad and also as an exposition of Yoga Shāstra, where Lord Krishna guides Arjuna to align his thoughts and actions to perform his duty and thereby attain supreme bliss.

One of the verses of the Gītā, (Chapter 8, verse 13) says: "One who thinks of Me at the time of the ultimate transit, by repeating the word Om attains the highest state."

Praṇava in Yoga Darshana

The Upanishads were followed by works on Vedanta, the gleanings of Vedic thought. One of them is the Yoga Shāstra; or the aphorisms of Yoga, composed by Sage Patan̄jali. In chapter 1, called Samādhi-pāda or Īllumination, the Sage says:

"Īllumination is attained by devotion to God. (23)

"He is defined as Praṇava--the Om" (27).

Praṇava and the Hindu Trinity

Praṇava is associated with the divine entity and three aspects of the divine being. The process of creation started with Praṇava. As such the Om is Brahmā, the creator.

Lord Viṣṇu, the preserver, has Praṇava as one of his names in the *Viṣṇu Sahasra Nāma Stotra*. (V. 102)

Lord Shiva, the terminator, awakens the divine vibrations of Om in all living beings.

What is more, the feminine form of the divine entity is Ādi Shakti, the vitality of the universe which again arises out of Chaitanya Praṇava or the vibrant aspect of Praṇava.

The omnipotence of the Praṇava is variously described in the foregoing references from our heritage. It may all be in the realm of theory. Here is a practical demonstration.

Collect about ten people, in a clean, quiet and ventilated room, in the morning or evening, and begin chanting the Praṇava, the *mantra* Om. Start with three seconds and extend each repetition by one or two more seconds. When all people reach the length of ten seconds, everyone will experience the lively vibrations of Om pervading in the whole room. Each one present in the room will experience inner tranquillity, happiness and peace.

Hareesh Raja is a seeker on the path of knowledge. He frequently writes on Yoga and religion.

Swami Vivekananda on Praṇava

In striking contrast to the din and bustle of Calcutta, there stands serenely beside the Gaṅgā, the Belur Math consecrated by Swami Vivekananda, nearly a hundred years ago. In the north-east corner of its precincts stands a simple yet beautiful structure, indicating the spot where Vivekananda's mortal remains were cremated. In the room on the ground level, there is a marble statue of Swami Vivekananda, and you may meditate here for a while and then climb up a few steps and stand before the upper room of the structure, where you will find only a metallic representation of Praṇava or Om.

When alone, Swami Vivekananda often used to chant Om, usually followed by *Namaḥ Shivāya*. This *mantra* was of great help to him, both for entering the realm of superconsciousness and coming down to the realm of the relative world.

In his lectures on Rājayoga, followed by his elucidation of Pātañjala Yoga Sūtras, he has elaborately dealt with the efficacy of Praṇava.

While giving instructions on *prāṇāyāma*, he directs the *sādhaka* to practise deep breathing, with a prolonged chanting of Om, believing that the sound flows in and out with the breath, rhythmically and harmoniously. "Then you will know what rest is. Once this rest comes, the most tired nerves will be calmed down." "Just think of Om and you can practise (Rājayoga) while you are sitting at your work."

Regarding *Gāyatrī Mantra*, he says Om is joined to it in the beginning and at the end. In one *prāṇāyāma*, repeat three *Gāyatrī mantras*. "There must be a natural connection between a symbol and the thing signified. When that symbol is pronounced, it recalls the thing signified. The manifesting word of God is Om. Repetition of Om and self-surrender to the Lord will strengthen the mind and bring fresh energies."

Swamiji says that *Om tat sat* is the only thing beyond Māyā' but God exists etemally. He uses a beautiful simile in this regard. As long as Nigara fall exists, the rainbow will also exist. The fall is the universe and the rainbow is the personal God. The water of life continously flows away.

According to him, Ishvara is ātman, whose name is Om. Repeat this name, meditate on it, think of all its wonderful nature and its attributes. Repeating Om is enough. No other ritual is necessary, the goal of the universe is to realise oneness with Om-one existence.

Then Swamiji pays homage to this sacred syllable when he spontaneously sings the Song of the Sannyāsin with its refrain *Sannyasin bold! Say--Om tat sat Om*.

Dr. N. B. Patil

Om and Pañcīkaraṇa

Sumitra M. Gautama

**Ādi Śaṅkara's 'Pañcīkaraṇa' helps bring
science and spirituality closer.**

The uniqueness of Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya's small but pregnant treatise, *Panchīkaraṇa*, lies in its ability to evolve spiritual equivalency to scientific truth, and to link the gross, the subtle and the causal to the supreme syllable.

Panchīkaraṇa also adds factual clarity to the exploration of Praṇava in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*. It does this primarily by explaining the dynamics of each of the three 'selves' described by the Upanishad--namely, Viśva, Taijasa and Prājña. It links the microcosmic to the macrocosmic by establishing the identical nature of Virāt and Viśva, Taijasa and Sūtrātmā, Hiraṇyagarbha and Akṣara (Iśvara). Sureshvarācharya's Vārttika helps immensely in deciphering the terse depth of the text itself.

He begins by stating, "The syllable 'Om' is the essence of the Vedas and it is revelatory of ultimate reality." As stated in the Advaitāshrama edition of the text, a Vārttika is "a commentary that supplements, elaborates and critically restates the thesis of the original." Sri Mahadeva Sastry calls this Vārttika, *Praṇava-Vārttika* in his Adayar edition.

The Vārttika thus throws powerful and sustained light on the nature of quintuplication, a scientific principle verifiable today, and the nature of Brahman. It is said, "Brahman transforms itself into the five rudimentary elements which, by admixture in different proportions, create the phenomenal world," though, in reality, "there is neither transformation nor world."

These five rudimentary elements are said to be earth, water, fire, air and ether, when graded from gross to subtle. At first, due to *māyā*, ether was formed, which was linked to and is of the nature of sound. From ether, air was generated, which is of the nature of sound and touch. Then came fire which is characterised by sound, touch, and form. This was followed by water which has four characteristics--sound, touch, form and taste. Then finally, the earth was generated, with the added quality of smell.

Subtle Elements

In the gross, phenomenological world, or the world of Viśva or Virāt, none of these subtle elements existed by itself--it was quintuplicated--retaining half its own nature and

one-eighth of each of the others. Thus, in this process, each faculty of the human being was linked to a particular element, and also to a power, which allowed for personal transformation through *upāsanā* upon the Om syllable, with its relationship to *jāgrat* (waking), *svapna* (dreaming) *sushupti* (causal state) and *turiya*.

Pancīkaraṇa relates these states to the complexity of the body's composition, and explores how the body as the eight-fold city

(1. Five organs of perception, 2. Five organs of action, such as hands, feet, excretory organs, procreative organs and speech, 3. Five vital breaths, 4. Four internal organs, i.e., *mana*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahaṅkāra*, 5. The subtle elements, 6. Avidyā, 7. Kāma, and 8. Karma) is transformed by Om, into enlightenment about the ultimate Reality.

This transformation takes place by resolution of the waking state into the dream state, the dream state into the causal state and the causal state into the Supreme.

The unique contribution of *Panchīkaraṇa* to the exposition of the power of Praṇava lies in the relationship it establishes between the gross and the sublime, through linking each aspect of the illusory world with the relevant macrocosmic force, and thence to realisation of the true nature of Brahman.

Thus, Prāṇa is linked to air, Vāk (speech) to fire, hands to Indra, feet to Viṣṇu, the organs of excretion to Yama, the procreative organ to Prajāpati, the intellect to Bṛhaspati, the Ahamkāra (ego) to Rudra, perception to Kṣethrajña and Tamas (Darkness) to the supreme Godhead, or Isvara.

Many are the meanings that this text offers to suit the scientific outlook of today and the establishment of Praṇava in this pattern as the sound of release from bondage is deeply significant. Ādi Śaṅkara says that the ordinary mind, caught in the world of seeming, needs "the process of some stay, or *ālambana*." The most sacred of all the *ālambanas*, it is said, is Om.

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Way to Immortality

Whoever realises the Supreme Brahman becomes Brahman itself--becomes one with it. Not only that, in his lineage a non-knower of Brahman is never born. He transcends all sorrows and sinfulness. Rid of all ignorance, he becomes completely free. He becomes immortal.

Muṇḍaka Upanishad



Part Two

Praṇava in Shākta Texts

Dr. Indira S. Ayyar

To understand the shakti in a Mantra is to know
the highest non-dualism inherent in all words.



In creation, the creative activity is Shakti, named *vimarsha*, while the Absolute remains as *prakāsha* or the eternal light. The ultimate reality is *prakāsha-vimarsha-māyā*. The Self and its Consciousness-of-Itself are ever united. Shakti always enjoys *svātantrya* or unimpeded power. This Shakti is designated variously as Parāshakti, Parahanta[?], Mātrikā.

This Shakti is the *raison d'etre* of all *mantras*. Without Shakti, *mantras* are as useless as the autumnal clouds, says *Tantrasadbhava*[?]. The word Shākta, derived from Shakti, is defined as that absorption in the apprehension of that reality which is beyond the range of utterance either gross or subtle, with total concentration.

It is said that to understand the Shakti in a *mantra* is to know the highest non-dualism inherent in all words. The Shaktis inherent in the alphabets are collectively known as Mātrikā. Mātrikā not only means the objectification (or the I-consciousness) of letters, but of the entire universe of subjects and objects.

The first Sanskrit alphabet 'a' denotes Śiva and the last letter 'ha' denotes Shakti. The two are represented in a Bindu. From this creation starts.

Pūrṇānanda Yati, commenting on the creation of the phenomenal world as described in the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*, explains it thus: The 'Aham' is not to be confused with the ego. Its seat is in the Sahasrāra. The red-hued Shakti aspect of this circle starts expanding.

From the stress thus created the universal sound emanates, which expands into the alphabets. These represent the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and space. The universe, from the atom right up to the cosmos, is derived from these elements.

Mantras are not merely the sound form of the combination of alphabets but the sound form of the respective divinities. Thus, Mātrikā is not only the matrix of creation but also of all ideation.

Mīmāṃsakas believe that Śabda is derived from and is the manifestation of Shakti. The Sāṅkhyas believe that the *panchabhūtas* are the manifestations of Shakti, as the modes of Prakriti. Tantrastra adopts both the above views.

Textual Mention

Kamaeshvarasuri has dealt with 14 different aspects of the unity of Śiva and Shakti in his elaborate commentary on the first verse of *Saundarya Laharī*, one of which is from the aspect of Praṇava.

Śiva acquires the power of Praṇava by uniting with Devi. Praṇava is the embodied form of Nāda, through its different stages in manifestation. Without such a union, Śiva would have remained dumb. Nāda, as we have seen earlier, gives rise extensively and efficiently to vowels, syllables, words, sentences and the like.

The Rishis of the three gods mentioned in the verse--Hari, Hara and Virinchi--are Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya; their meters--Gāyatrī, Trishtubh, and Jagatī; their colours--red, white and black; their states--Jāgrat, Svapna and Sushupti; their seats---earth, ether and heaven; their *svaras*--*Udatta*, *Anudatta* and *Svarita*; their Vedas---Ṛg, Yajus and Sāman; their Agnis--Gārhapatya, Āhavanīya and Dakṣiṇa; their Kālās--morning, noon and evening; their *guṇas*--Sattva, Rajas and Tamas; their functions--Sṛṣṭi, Sthiti and Laya.

By naming the three deities all that they denote are also indicated.

Some take it that the three gods themselves stand for Praṇava and by mentioning that they serve Devi, Devi's superiority even to the Praṇava is stated.

The eighth verse again mentions *Paramaśivaparyāṅkanilayām* which stands for the union of Bindu (Paramaśiva) and Nāda (Parāshakti). The couch is made up of *a, u, m* and the *ardhamātrā* representing Hari, Hara, Brahmā and Īśvara. This is reiterated in the 92nd verse of the same text.

Arthur Avalon feels that the five components of Praṇava that is, *a, u, m, Nāda* and Bindu are expressed in this verse. The same idea is mentioned in the 58th *nāma* in the *Lalitā Sahasranāma, Pancha-brahmāsana-sthitā*.

The 14th verse again mentions Devī's feet as being far above the rays emanating from the six *chakras*. These rays also correspond to the six seasons and the Goddess' feet represent Nāda and Bindu, transcending all Time. The rays are said to denote Prajāpati, Creator, according to some commentators.

In the *Lalitā Sahasranāma*, the 237th name *Chatuḥshashti-kalāmayī* denotes Devi as the source of all knowledge, such as the Vedas. The 275th *nāma* suggests that Devī should be meditated in the orb of the sun as Gāyatrī. *Bhānumaṇḍala-madhyasthā* also denotes the Anāhata Chakra. The 844th name *Chhandah-sārā* states that Devī is the essence of the Vedas, that is the Gāyatrī.

Bhāskararāya in his *Saubhāgya Bhāskara* says that her nature is established in the Upanishadic portion of the Vedas. He states that in the 14 methods of attaining Knowledge, the Vedas are essential, and Gāyatrī is denoted, as it is the essence of the Vedas.

There are two forms of the Gayatrī *mantra*. One is explicitly mentioned in the Vedas. The other is the Shakti *mantra*, treasured and kept hidden by her votaries. There are said to be three divisions (*kūṭa*) in the *mantra*, each being equal to Gayatri.

The name Uma is said be a variation of Praṇava.

The *Sūta Saṃhitā* says Uma also means the best *cittavṛtti*. The *Rudra Yāmala* says: "Uma is the Supreme Shakti...assuming the form of Oṃkāra.'

In the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, Himavān hymns Devī and says: "I bow down to the form which is in the sun's disc, who is all the Vedas, the one object of knowledge..."

Śāṅkara says in his *Navaratnamālikā stotram* (verse, 7)... "I contemplate in my mind Parādevatā who is the form of Praṇava."

Kālidāsa in his *Shyamaladaṇḍakam* calls her..."the personification of all mantras..., sounds and words."

Skanda Purāṇa also says "She is Praṇavarūpiṇī, ever youthful, Sivā, endless, and oozing nectar."

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research scholar on the Mother Goddess cult.

Esoteric Om in Music



In his devotional compositions, Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda begins his famous *Navaratnamālikā Stotra* in praise of the Divine Mother as "Om̐kāra-pañjara-śukīm."

The great Karnatik music composer, Muthuswami Dikshitar attributes Praṇava to divinities and divine manifestations. He refers to the Lord in *Vatapi Ganapatim* as 'Praṇava Swarūpam.' He praises *Ekam-ranathan* [Ekāmrānātha?] in a song as *Om̐kārarūpam Śivam*. He refers to the temple Vi-rnana [Vimāna?] of Lord Raṅganātha in the song '*Raṅganāyakam*' as being in the shape of Praṇava.

Tyagaraja bows to Śaṅkara as "Nāda Tanumanisam.[?]" In *Moksha-mugalata[?]*, he refers to Praṇava Nāda which manifests itself as Sapta Svaras, the seven notes.

The national bard Subramanya Bharati derives his inspiration and power from "Om" which he regards as Parāshakti in his song *Om Śakthi*.

M. Sundaresan

Om in the Purāṇas



The Itihāsa Purāṇa literature constitute [?] the source books for understanding our culture. In fact, they are declared as helpful in expounding the hidden truth in the Vedas.

Hence we quite often find quotations in the Purāṇas from the Upanishads and the Vedas. We find in the Purāṇas explanation of the origin and significance of the syllable Om, sometimes quoting passages from the Upanishads and at other times explaining them. Hence, wherever it is necessary reference to the Upanishads is also made.

The *Vāyupurāṇa* and the *Liṅgapurāṇa* have a section each describing how the Yogin has to acquire proficiency in Oṃkāra.

In that context these two Purāṇas explain the significance of these *mātrās* comprising the Oṃkāra. The *Skandapurāṇa* states that the Oṃkāra is the first among the three gods. It is the essence that makes the Supreme Brahman explicit.

Three Steps

The *Oṃkāra* is identical with the three Vedas (*Ṛg*, *Yajur* and *Sāma*), three worlds (Bhūr, Bhuvā and Svar), the three fires (Gārhapatya, Āhavanīya and Dakṣiṇa), the three steps of Viṣṇu (for subduing King Bali). The 'A' sound is known as imperishable (*aksharam*), 'U' sound is *svarita* (middle accent) and 'M' sound the *pluta* (the elongated accent). The heaven is its head, the Brahmaloka constitutes its feet. The *mātrā* represents the Rudraloka. Lord Śiva's place is above that.

We find a method of contemplation for the realisation of Brahman advocated for the yogins making use of the Praṇava. Praṇava is the bow, Ātman is the arrow and Brahman is the target. The target should be pierced by one who does not err. The aspirant should get absorbed like an arrow. This statement found in the *Vāyupurāṇa* and *Liṅgapurāṇa* has been drawn from the *Muṇḍakopanishad*.

In another context, the *Liṅgapurāṇa* refers to this single-syllabled *mantra* Om and states that the all-pervading Lord Śiva is stationed in it. Lord Śiva declares that the three letters A, U, M, are present in his Praṇava and the letters U, M, and A.

The Śiva Purāṇa eulogises the glory and greatness of Śiva. As Ratna Ma Navaratnam says in her book, *Aum Gaṇeśa*, it describes the ritual and philosophical principles of the Śiva cult, embodies descriptions, sermons and dissertations on the greatness of his divinity, and recounts his emblems, attributes and exploits. This Mahāpurāṇa is a sacred text of the Śaivites.

Dr. Gangadharan

Pancha Praṇavas

Dr. Varadachari Sadagopan

Praṇava has a unique place in the realm of Tantric worship which is described as Pratyaksha Śāstra by its votaries.



Om is considered typically as the Vedic Praṇava to distinguish it from the other five Praṇavas used in the Tāntric or Āgamic worship of individual deities like Sarasvatī, Lakshmī, Kālī, Śrī Vidyā and Durgā. These five Praṇavas used in such worship are Eym, [Aim], Sreem [Śrīm], Kreem [Krīm], Hreem [Hrīm] and Kleem [Klīm]. These Praṇavas also have Vedic roots and could still be considered as Vedic Praṇavas.

The Tantras and Āgamas have Vedic sanction insofar as they stem from the same Vedic tree just as Smṛtis and Purāṇas. The Tāntric worship claims to be practical in approach and therefore has been described as Pratyaksha Śāstra, providing direct experience of the chosen God or Goddess.

It is particularly appealing to those who have difficulty in grappling with complex Vedāntic doctrines for advancement in their spiritual pursuits.

Tāntric and Āgamic worshippers approach the very same gods and goddesses worshipped in Vedas in a ritualistic and sacramental manner. For instance, Goddess Lakshmī is the object of worship in the *Śrī Sūkta* of *Yajur Veda* as well as in *Lakshmī Tantra*. Sarasvatī is worshipped through the *Vāk Sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda* and by Tantric means. The tenth *maṇḍala* of *Ṛg Veda* celebrates Devī through the *Devī Sūkta* and the Śāktas worship her as Durgā, Śrī Vidyā and Bhuvaneśvarī through Tāntric methods.

One important method of Tāntric worship is to use Praṇavas such as Hrīm, Śrīm in the *japa* and meditations of the worshippers. The appropriate Praṇavas contain letters

(Mātrikās) and sounds associated with the specific deities and are used as seed centres of sound to establish the link between the worshippers and the worshipped.

Lalitā Hrīm

Ādi Śaṅkara has commented extensively on the relationship between Śrī Lalitā and her Praṇava Hrīm in his commentary on *Lalitā Triśatī*. Hrīm occurs 60 times in the *Lalitā Triśatī*, which has a total of 300 names describing her majesty. Śaṅkara has established that Hrīm is the Varṇa Samudāya (grouping of letters) that reveals her. He has pointed out that she is present inside Hrīm like the future banyan tree inside the banyan seed in an unmanifest form. The same argument is valid for the other Praṇavas used in the worship of different chosen deities.

Hrīm like Om is also celebrated as Prakāśa (revelatory) as well as Vimarsha (deliberative) Praṇava. Hrīm is also known as Māyā Bījam or Bhuvaneśvarī Bījam.

This Praṇava is made Up of Hakāra (H), Repha (R), Īkāra (Ī) and Makāra (M). The Hakāra in combination with Repha represents her power of absorbing the whole universe within her. Īkāra with Makāra point out her powers of illuminating the entire universe.

This Praṇava in its entirety connotes her powers of creation, protection and destruction of the universe and its beings. Hrīm can be used to worship her in the Saguṇa and Nirguṇa forms. The twenty-second *nāma* in *Lalitā Triśatī* salutes her as *Om Ekaksharyai Namaḥ*.

The Praṇava Hrīm occurs thrice in the *Panchadaśāksharī-mantra* of Śrī Lalitā. It appears as the fifth, eleventh and fifteenth letters of this *mantra* made up of 15 letters. Ādi Śaṅkara's commentary on Hrīm in this text is a great help to the Lalitā (Śrī Vidyā) worshippers in understanding the Vedic root of their Tāntric worship.

Sarasvatī: Aim

She is the only Goddess sung in all the four Vedas. Her Praṇava is Aim. It is known as the Sārasvata Praṇava dealing with the Goddess of Knowledge. One recites and meditates on this Praṇava to acquire knowledge, wisdom and the power of speech.

Sarasvatī, according to *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, is the divine speech, the Goddess of Word. One verse of the *Ṛg Veda* explains her blessings this way: "One aspiring for transcendent knowledge invokes Sarasvatī; when one aspires to undertake sacred works for the good of all, they also invoke Sarasvatī. Sarasvatī blesses all of them who dedicate themselves for noble ends."

Aurobindo identifies Sarasvatī as the word (Aim), as the inspiration that comes from

Ṛtam, the truth-consciousness. Brihat or cosmic intelligence elaborated by the Vedic texts arises from that Ṛtam as well. Thus, the link is established between the "infinitesimal, individual mind" of the aspirant and the cosmic intelligence through the *japa* of the Sārasvata Praṇava.

Lakshmī: Śrīm

Śrīm is the Praṇava associated with Mahā Lakshmī. This Praṇava is known as Lakshmī Bījam. Here 'Ś' represents the transcendent divinity of fortune; 'R' means wealth; 'Ī' stands for the satisfaction arising from the acquisition of that wealth; the nasalisation 'M' denotes the dispelling of the sorrows of poverty. This Praṇava is recited to acquire worldly wealth, power, beauty and glory.

Kālī: Krīm

Her Praṇava is Krīm. It is also known as Kālī Bīja or Ādya (primordial) Bīja. This is made up of letters 'K', 'R', 'Ī', and 'M.' The letter 'K' denotes the power of time, which reminds one of her destructive aspect. The letter 'R' represents Brahman or the limitless and infinite aspect of Kālī. The elongated 'Ī' stands for the transcendent power of illusion. The combination of the first three letters (Krī) of this Praṇava denotes the Great Mother of the Universe. The nasalisation indicates her power of dispelling the worshipper's sorrows. The Kālī Bīja is recited to achieve transcendent knowledge and Vairāgya.

Parāśakti: Klīm

This Praṇava is known as the Kāma Bījam or Kāma Kalā. The three letters 'K', 'L', 'ĪM' stand for the Moon, Sun and Agni respectively. This Praṇava is recited to acquire transcendental knowledge, pleasure, victory and royal power. This Praṇava is also used to worship Ādi Parāśakti and hence is known as another Śākta Praṇava.

Role of Guru

In worship using Praṇava to attain the blessings of the chosen deity, the aspirant has intense desire to become one with that deity. He practises the recitation, *ucāraṇa*, of the Praṇava and meditates on the subtle meaning of that Praṇava. The word *ucāraṇa* literally means moving up (ut+cara); it denotes the moving of the aspirant's mind upwards towards the light of the deity with which he is seeking to establish connection.

The potency of the Praṇava cannot be fully harnessed by the aspirant unless he is guided and blessed by a competent guru, who himself has attained Self-realisation.

Source of All Knowledge

Om. The first born effulgent being was Brahmā, the master and projector of this universe. He was also the protector of this world. He taught the knowledge of Brahman to his eldest son Atharva. This knowledge is the source (basis) of all kinds of knowledge, both secular and spiritual.

That, the Supreme Brahman, which is realised by the wise sages, is imperceptible and incoprehensible; It is unborn and without any colour; It is devoid of eyes and ears, hands and feet; It is almighty, eternal, omnipotent and undecaying. It is the very source of the universe.

This universe has emerged from the imperishable Brahman by māyā in a special way. It is like the spider weaving the web out of itself, or like the medicinal herbs coming out of the earth, or like the hair growing on a man.

Muṇḍaka Upanishad

The Liberating Logos

Praṇava is used in *Yoga sādhanā* for the uninterrupted vision of the Self. It consists of triple sounds, A, U, M. In the chant, the different parts of Oṃkāra are dissolved in Śānta, the peace. A is dissolved in U, U in M, M in *bindu*, the *bindu* in *nāda*, and the *nāda* in *śakti*, and the *śakti* in *śānta*.

Correspondingly, there are five states of consciousness. They are *jāgrat* (waking), *svapna* (dream), *sushupti* (dreamless slumber), *turīya* (the fourth state), *tadatīta* (that which is above the fourth).

In *jāgrat*, the soul enjoys with the aid of the senses. *Svapna* is the feeling or perception through the senses devoid of consciousness. *Sushupti* is the state of quietude. *Turīya* is the state when Ātman sees the Supreme with unclouded vision. The fifth is that which precedes liberation.

Any *mantra*, unless preceded and ended by Praṇava, is not fruitful. Gifts, sacrifices, penance, recitation of Vedas, *japa*, meditation, rites, *homa*, all these should be preceded by Om. The *Sruti* says, "All speech is hidden in the Praṇava." Here the speech is construed as *mantra*.

Om tat sat is considered to be the three-fold symbol of Brahman. By this were ordained, the Brāhmins, the Vedas, and the sacrifices. Om denotes the absolute supremacy. *Tat* denotes the universality. And *Sat*, the Reality of the Brahman. Thus, Om relates to Existence and that which is beyond.

The *Brihatpārāśara Smṛiti* says that the Praṇava is the great Reality--*tattva*. It is the three Vedas, the three qualities, the three godheads, the three worlds, the three states of consciousness, *jāgrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti*, the triple divisions of time, the past, present and the future and the three genders. The whole universe is pervaded by the three-fold Praṇava.

Praṇava represents the Supreme, who is of the form of knowledge---*Śuddha jñānaika mūrti*. He is the meaning of Praṇava. He is worshipped in the form of *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* with his gesture of *chīn-mudrā* the symbol of wisdom, signifying the oneness of the *jivātman* and *Paramātman*. All sounds emanate from silence and end in silence. That silence alone is the liberating logos, the Om, the saving grace of all mankind.

M. V. B. S. Sarma

Praṇava in Vaishṇava Tradition

Dr. (Mrs.) VANAMALA PARTHASARATHY

*The Āchāryas of the Vaishṇava tradition point out
that implied in Praṇava are the pervasiveness
and protective nature of Śrīman
Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdevī.*



Rāmānuja Āchārya (1017-1137 A.D.) explains that the root of Praṇava is the sacred letter 'A,' and he who is named by 'A' is the supreme God, and is none other than Nārāyaṇa who is the basis or root of all entities (*Vedārtha Saṅgraha*: 141. He indirectly talks about *mūlamantra* as *mūlamantreṇa* in his *Vaikuntha Gadya*.

Parāśara Bhattār, a younger contemporary of Rāmānuja and belonging to the twelfth century, also gives the interpretation for Praṇava in the context of *mūlamantra* or *tirumantra* in his *Ashtaślokī*.

Accordingly, 'A' indicates Vishṇu, who creates, protects and annihilates the universe, the letter 'M' indicates the soul (*jīva*), who is in the service of the Lord Vishṇu, and 'U' stands for such a relationship between the two (only) and none else. Thus Praṇava, the essence of the three Vedas, conveys the above meaning. Further, he elucidates the significance of the entire *mantra* and how one does not belong to oneself also.

Further, he says if the devotee thinks the body and soul are the same he should try and understand the significance of the letter 'M' in Aum, (which points out that he is a sentient being and not inanimate) and if he thinks he is independent he should learn the letter 'A,' (which conveys that he is an instrument in the hands of the Lord), and if he thinks he is subject to somebody else other than the Lord, he should learn 'U,' (which clearly states his relationship with him).

The first Vaishṇava Āchārya to write *Rahasya granthas*, namely the works containing secret doctrines, in the *sūtra* style and in *maṇipravāla* (a style in which Tamil is used interspersed with Sanskrit words) was Pillai Lokāchārya (1264-1369 A.D.).

Mūlamantra

He composed 18 works known as *Ashtādaśa-rahasyankal* on Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. One of them is *Mumukshuppati* (according to the *mumukshu*). A *mumukshu* is one who is yearning for salvation.

It consists of three sections (*prakaraṇam*) which examine in detail the *mūlamantra* (*tirumantram* / *ashtākshara*); *dvayam* and the *charamaśloka* which are all prescribed for Śrīvaishṇavas. *Dvayam* consists of two phrases namely (a) *Śrīmannārāyaṇacharaṇau śaraṇam prapadye* (b) *Śrīmate Nārāyaṇāya namaḥ*. The *charama śloka* is from *Bhagavad Gītā* (18.66).

In the very first section titled *Tirumantra prakaraṇam*, the significance of *praṇava* is elaborately analysed. Some of the ideas expressed in the above text are as follows: *The tirumantra* consists of eight letters and three words which imply the meanings 'subservience' (*sesha-tvare*) to the Lord; 'dependence' (*pāratantryam*); and service unto him (*kainkaryam*) respectively (*sūtras* 28,30).

Lovely Simile

Of the three words, the first one is *praṇava*. Using a beautiful simile the author says like the butter that has been churned out from three (different) pots of curds, the three letters of *praṇava* ('A', 'U', 'M') are taken to represent the three Vedas, Ṛg, Yajus and Sama (*sūtra* 33).

Like the interpretations pointed out earlier, 'A' is assigned to Nārāyaṇa and it says that 'A' is the abbreviated form of the word Narayana and hence it stands for him who is the creator and protector of all (*sūtra* 35).

The question is whether 'A' stands for the Goddess (*Piraatti*) also. According to the text, the Goddess's presence is essential for affording protection and so his relationship with Śrī is connoted here (*sūtra* 40). So unlike in *Padma Purāṇa*, where 'U' denotes Śrī, here her position is emphasised (as she is the eternal companion of the Lord) especially while protecting the devotees and therefore she becomes implied in the letter 'A' itself.

Then the point is how does she remain eternally with the Lord (*Emperuman*) and yet keeps links with the individual soul (*chetana*). The text gives a beautiful example. Like a

mother who neither abandons her husband's bed nor her child's cradle, her trait is to stay and not leave either the first letter ('A') or the last ('M') which stands for the soul (*sūtra* 42).

Subservience to Mother

The essential nature of the soul is subservience to the Lord. However the letter 'A' does not clearly show that the soul is subservient to the Goddess as well. To this, the text gives an example. When a man employs a servant the agreement does not specify his services to the wife, yet the servant serves her also. In the same manner, we are servants of the Goddess (*sūtra* 44). Thus 'subservience' is the basic nature (*svarūpa*) of the soul (*sūtra* 55).

The author goes on elucidating further from the grammatical point of view to show that the soul is subservient to the Lord (*su-tras* 48-51). The letter 'U' indicates 'exclusivity' (*sūtra* 58). This would lead to the fact the soul is subservient to none else (*sutra* 59).

Lastly the twenty-fifth letter 'M' denotes 'knowledge' and refers to the soul (*sūtra* 66). Here it stands for the group of souls and not just one (*sūtra* 67). Therefore the soul is the 'knower' and is different from the body (*sūtra* 69).

Hence Praṇava propounds the relationship between the Lord and the soul as expressed (in the hymn) "I am the servant of the one who is in Kannapuram; Do I belong to anyone else?" (*sūtra* 72). The hymn is that of Tirumankai Alvar (*Priya Tirumoli* 8:9;3).

Auspicious Thread

It is then shown that the component letters of Praṇava provide an elaboration of the *tirumantram* (*sūtra* 76). Subservience to Lord's devotees is another important issue that is taken up for discussion. Subservience to the Lord's devotees is the consummation of subservience to the Lord and is implied in letter 'A'. Others say that the exclusive subservience to the Lord and to none other consummates in subservience to those who are his devotees and hence some say it is in letter 'U' it is implied that (soul) belongs to no other.

The chapter on *Tirumantram* consists of 115 *sūtras*. The concluding portion says that *tirumantram* is like the auspicious thread (*maṅgala sūtra*) and that the Lord would protect the soul like the husband (*sutra* 114). Thus the *tirumantram* states: "I belong to the Lord (*Emperuman*) alone. I should stop belonging to myself and be permitted to perform all kinds of service to Nārāyaṇa who is the served one of all (*sūtra* 115).

The commentary for the text has been composed by Manavala Mamunikal (1370-1443 A.D.) which is elucidative and helpful to comprehend the text.

Vedanta Desika (1268-1369 A.D.), another great Vaishṇava Āchārya of the post-Rāmānuja period, has composed great masterpieces. *Rahasyatrayasāram* is one of his works composed in *maṇipravāla* style. Herein a detailed interpretation of *mūlamantra* is given in chapter 27. He draws upon several authoritative sources in the discussions. As far as the elucidation of the letters of Praṇava goes, it remains the same as above.

Vishṇu and Śrī

A survey of all the references on the interpretation of Praṇava point out to the following facts. Vishṇu's pervasiveness, and his protective nature are implied in the Praṇava and its components. It is Vishṇu (Nārāyaṇa) alone who protects and saves the soul. Śrī, his eternal consort whose presence is necessary for the protection, is also shown as implied in the component.

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Nāḍopāsana

R. Asha

**Music, sung with devotion and understanding leads
to the merging of the mind in Nāḍa Brahman
resulting in transcendental bliss**



From ancient times, music in India has been considered sacred and a means for attainment of the supreme. Endowed with depth, sublimity and divinity, it is capable of raising man from the mundane to the spiritual level of bliss.

The antiquity of this tradition can be traced as far back as the Vedas. Among the Vedas, the *Sāma Veda* is especially music-oriented, the essence of which, we are told, is Praṇava or Omkāra. Omkāropāsana is one of the many Vidyas (*Udgītha vidyā*) taught in the Upanishads.

The Upanishad says: *Om ityetad aksharam udgītham upāsīta*. This Om, this imperishable Udgītha, must be worshipped. The nature of Om as the essence of music and ultimately the essence of all creation is then elaborated. 'Of all these of creation; earth is the essence; of earth, water; of water, herbs; of herbs, man; of man, speech; of speech, poetry; of poetry, music; of music, Praṇava. Thus Omkāra is the most valuable, final essence of all essences.'

Nāḍopāsana has formed an integral part of Indian culture which can boast of many nāḍopāsakas through the ages. Coming in this illustrious line is the saint-singer Tyāgarāja, one of the famed music trinity. His songs, apart from being soaked in the nectar of Rāmabhakti, also embody some principles and practice of Nāḍayoga (Praṇavopāsana). This article proposes to highlight some of these.

Om as Nāda Brahmam

Praṇava or Oṃkāra is conceived as Nāda Brahmam. The Self-luminous Brahman manifests itself in the Nāda. This can again be conceived of in an abstract *nirguṇa* aspect or in a *saguṇa* aspect. Tyāgarāja incorporated both these aspects in his *kritis*. In the *kriti Vara rāga* (Rāga Chenchu-kambhoji), he says that 'Nāda, which emanates from the body is of the form of the sacred Praṇava' *Dehodbhavambagu nadamul divyamau Pranavakara mane*.

Tyagaraja goes further and conceives Nāda to have taken the form of Śrī Rāmachandra. He praises the Lord as *nādātmaka* (*Ni bhakti bhagya* in Raga Jayamanohari), *nādarūpa* (*Ni daya* in Ritigaula), *nāda brahmānanda rūpa* (Lord as the ambrosial bliss of Nāda), *nāda-brahmānanda-rasakriti*, etc.

Indulging in a fine piece of imagination, he describes Rāma as the embodiment of Nāda, in the following way:

'The Nectar of Nāda, which is the basis of all Vedas, Purāṇas, Āgamas and Śāstras has taken human form (in Rāma); the seven *svaras* have become the seven bells of the bow; the Rāgas have become the bow itself; the styles Dura, Naya, Desya, have become the three strings of the bow; the steady pace has become the arrow; the melodius apt variations of phrase have become his speech.' (*Ndasudhārasambilanu in Arabhi*).

Apart from being 'nādarūpa,' the Lord is also described by Tyāgaraja as *Saṅgīta-rasika* and *sāma-gāna-lola*.'

Process of Nādotpatti

The process of Nādotpatti is incorporated in the interpretation of the word 'Nāda' itself. 'Due to the interaction of *prāṇa* (vital air) and *agni* (fire), *nāda* is born (generated) in the *mūlādhāra*. It then moves upwards and manifests itself as the *saptasvaras*. '

All this is echoed by Tyāgarāja in the *kriti, Mokshamu Gatata* (Saramati).

To know and realise the nature of this Nāda, originating from the *mūlādhāra*, is bliss and salvation. *Muladharaja nadameruguta mudamagu mokshamura* (*Svarārāga sudhā in Śaṅkarābharaṇam*).

Tracing the physical movement of Nāda (as *svaras*) from the navel upwards, the saint says *Nabhi-hrit-kantha rasana nasadulayandu* (*Svaras* move from the navel to the heart, throat, tongue, nose etc. (*Sobhillu in Raga Jaganmohini*).

The emanation of the seven *svaras* from Praṇava is referred to in *the kriti Samajavaragama* as *Vedashiromaatrja saptasvara-nadaachaladipa*. This phrase praises the Lord as 'shining like a beacon light on the mountain of Nāda of the seven *svaras* born of the Praṇava which is the source of all Vedanta.'

In another *kriti Ragasudharasa*, Tyagaraja describes Omkara as Sadashiva himself (*Sadashiva mayamaku nadomkara svara vidulu*). He then proceeds to describe how *the svaras* emanated from the five faces of Sadāshiva. *Sadyojatadi-panchavaktraja Sari-gama-pa-dha-ni* (*Kriti, Nadatanumanisam, Raga, Chittaranjani*).

The five faces are Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpurusha and Īśāna are said to represent the five elements earth, water, fire, air and ether. The *svaras* are said to have been bom thus: Gandhāram from Sadyojāta, Dhaivata from Vāmadeva, Shaḍja from Aghora, Panchama from Tatpurusha, Nishāda and Madhyama from Īśāna.

On the psychic plane, the *svaras* are also regarded as being connected with the mystic *chakras* in the body. *Sa* is connected with *mūlādhāra*; *Ri* with *svādhishthāna*; *Ga*, with *manipura*; *Ma* with *anāhata*; *Pa*, with *Viśuddha*; *Dha* with *ājñā* and *Ni* with *sahasrāra*.

'Chanting of Om in different pitches is also said to be effective in awakening the *chakras*.'

As Tyāgarāja sings 'a knowledge of the various resonant *sthānas* from which emanate the glorious *saptasvaras*,' is conducive to salvation.

Kolahala saptasvara grihamula gu-rute mokshamura. (Svara rāga sudhā in Śaṅkarābharaṇam).

It is this Nāda that Tyāgarāja exhorts one to worship and to delight in the nectar of the bliss it affords. (*Raga sudha rasa paanamu jesi rajillave manasa*).

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Praṇava and Sāma Veda



The Sāma Veda has special links to Praṇava and Nādopāsana. The *Sāma Veda* is sung by Udgāṭṛ priests at Vedic rituals. The singing of *Sāmans* or *Sāma Veda mantras* is known as Udgītha. The Praṇava is also referred to as the imperishable Udgītha by *Chāndogya Upanishad*, a major Upanishad belonging to *Sāma Veda*.

The Nādopāsana has its roots in the *Udgītha* of *Sāma Veda*. Lord Krishna's statement that he is *Sāma Veda* among all the Vedas attests to the efficacy of attaining him through Nādopāsana. The importance of Praṇava Udgītha is once again revealed from a portion of the sacred *Hayagrīva mantra* (*Om Praṇavodgītha vacase namaḥ*). Lord Hayagrīva is the Lord of all Vidyās including Brahma Vidyā. The portion of his *mantra* quoted above recognizes that his speech is of the form of Praṇava Udgītham.

Nātya Śāstra

Sage Bharata, the author of *Nātya Śāstra*, has also stated that Brahma extracted the art and science of music from *Sāma Veda*. The Upāsana of the supreme Lord through *Sāma Gāna* (Udgītha Upāsana) has been pointed out by Sage Yājñavalkya, the greatest authority on Smritis, this way: "Clearing one's senses, memory, mind and intellect of all other objects, the supreme Ātman, which is within oneself shining like a lamp, should be contemplated upon. Intoning *Sāma Gana* in the proper manner without break and practising it with concentration makes one attain the supreme Godhead."

Sage Yājñavalkya has also revealed that the singing of the Sāmans to the accompaniment of Vīṇā leads to Moksha.

Dr. Varadachari Sadagopan

Part Three

Māṇḍūkya Upanishad

Om as Symbol

Swami Lokeswarananda



The *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* is found in the *Atharva Veda*. It is one of the shortest Upanishads, having only 12 verses. The Upanishad is so called perhaps because that was the name of the sage who composed it.

Gauḍapāda, teacher of Govinda-pāda, who was Ādi Śaṅkara's teacher, wrote a Kārika (an auxiliary work) on the Upanishad. It is brief, but it is a self-contained and very well argued presentation on non-dualism.

The Kārikā states that there is nothing but the Self. It totally rejects duality.

Most Upanishads have one or more stories round which the philosophy they are presenting is woven. This, however, is not the case with the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*. It gives its message not through a story, but through a symbol. This symbol is Aum, commonly pronounced as Om.

No amount of discussion can give us any idea about Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. We have to have recourse to the use of a symbol. For example, there is a round black stone called a *Nārāyaṇa śilā*. It is only a stone, and a small stone too, yet many people worship it as God himself. Those who worship it know what it is, yet they try to imagine that it is God. They do not worship the stone; they worship God. The stone is only a symbol. Anything can be a symbol of God, since God is everywhere and in everything and is

everything.

Apt Symbol

Om is considered an apt symbol of Brahman, for just as Brahman is all-inclusive, Om is also all-inclusive so far as sound is concerned. As you pronounce Aum, you touch all the points in your mouth from where sounds emerge. This is why Om is called Śabda Brahman, the sound that represents Brahman.

Om is the holiest sound in the Hindu tradition. It is equivalent to the Vedas, symbolically speaking. The Upanishad declares that Aum and Brahman are the same. They support the phenomenal world--Om supporting the phenomenal world represented by sounds and Brahman supporting the phenomenal world represented by the varieties of sense experience.

When the phenomenal world is negated by knowledge, there is only the substratum left that is, Aum or Brahman. It is like the snake being negated, leaving behind only the rope.

But how do you meditate on Aum ? First, you meditate that in your waking state you are Virāt--that is, Brahman as the sum total of all physical bodies. This is represented by A, the first letter of Aum. Next you are Hiraṇyagarbha Brahman as the sum total of all minds, which is U of Aum. Then you imagine that when you have sound sleep you are one with Īś-vara, which is Brahman associated with its power of *māyā*. This is represented by M of Aum.

So far you are within the domain of ignorance. If you are able to go still further, beyond all letters, beyond Om, then you become one with *turīya*, pure consciousness. You are then *amātra*, beyond duality. You are Brahman.

This is how Om helps you reach the goal of life. You are always Brahman, but somehow or other you are not aware of it. One way to dispel this ignorance is to continually remind yourself that you are Brahman. If you do it in the waking state, its effect will follow through in your dreaming and deep sleep states also. And it will eventually take you to *turīya*.

Omityetadakshramidam sarvam tasyopavyākhyānam bhūtam bhavad bhavishyaditi sarvamomkāra eva; yaccānyat trikālātītam tadapyomkāra eva.

1. Om stands for Brahman both Brahman as the cause and Brahman as the effect. Om is this phenomenal world. To make it clearer, it is the past, the present, and the future. All this is nothing but Omkāra. If there is anything beyond this, that too is Omkāra.

Sarvam hyetad brahmāyamātmā brahma. So'yamātmā chatushpā t.

2. *All this (phenomenal) world is Brahman. This (individual) Self is also Brahman. This Self (apparently) has four states.*

(The same Brahman is seen in four states: The first is viśva, the gross physical level. When we are awake we perceive this physical universe with our senses. But when we are sleeping this world also exists. It exists mentally. It is then taijasa, in the mind. In that state we dream that we are eating something or going somewhere or doing something. Then the next state is when we are in deep sleep. In that state there is only undifferentiated consciousness, prājña. Everything is enveloped in darkness. Yet when we wake up we feel very refreshed. But there is yet another state, the turīya state, the fourth state. In that state we are one with consciousness itself. We realise our oneness with Brahman).

Jāgaritasthāno bahishprajñāḥ saptāṅga ekonavimsati-mukhaḥ sthūlabhug vaisvānaraḥ prathamāḥ pdaḥ.

3. *When you are awake, you are conscious of the external world, and you enjoy the world through your sense organs. You then use the seven limbs, the nineteen doors of perception, and the gross body that you have as an individual. This is the first manifestation of the Self.*

The Upanishad mentions saptāṅga, seven limbs: the head, the eyes, the nose, the trunk, the kidney, and the feet. Then there are nineteen organs. First are the panca jñānendriyas, the five organs of knowledge (the ears, the eyes, the organ of touch, the tongue, and the nose). Then there are the panca karmendriyas, the five organs of action (the organ of speech, the hands, the feet, the organ of evacuation, and the organ of generation); then the panca pranas, the five aspects of the vital breath (prāṇa, apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna); and finally the four aspects of the mind (manas, buddhi, citta, and ahaṅkāra).

Svapnasthāno'ntaḥprajñāḥ saptāṅga ekonavimśati-mukhaḥ praviviktabhuktaijaso dvitīyah pādaḥ.

4. *The activity you have when you are dreaming is all mental. It involves nothing outside the mind. It is only a reflection of your desires and earlier experiences. You have all your seven limbs and nineteen organs intact, as you had when you were awake, but if you enjoy*

anything now it is on the mental plane. There is nothing physical. This lord of the mental experience is the second state (of Brahman).

Yatra supto na kañcana kāmam kāmayate na kañcana svapnam paśyati tat sushuptam; sushuptasthāna ekībhūtaḥ prajñānaghana evānandamayo hyānandabhuk chetomukhaḥ prājñās tritīyaḥ pdaḥ.

5. *When you are in deep sleep you have no desires in your mind, nor do you have any dreams. This is called sushupti. In this state you are not aware of things, as you are when you are awake or dreaming. You see no duality; you see only unity. But you cannot stay in this state long. It is as if you have reached the point where you have to turn back to the dream state or the waking state. This is prājñā, the third state of the Self.*

Esha sarveśvara esha sarvajña esho'ntaryāmyesha yoniḥ sarvasya praabhavāpyayau hi bhūtānām.

6. *This prājñā is the Lord of all. He knows everything. He is the indwelling controller of all. All things arise from him and also merge into him. He is the cause of all.*

Nāntaḥprajñam na bahishprajñam nobhayataḥprajñam na prajñānaghanam na prajnam nāprajñam; adṛṣtam-avyavahāryam-agrāhyam-alakṣaṇam-acintyam-avyapadeśyam-ekātmapratyayasāram prapañcōpaśamam śāntam sivam advaitam caturtham manyante sa ātmā sa vijñeyaḥ.

7. *Turīya is not conscious of what is happening within (which implies that it is not taijasa). It is also not conscious of what is going on without (which implies that it is not viśva). It is not conscious of anything in between. It is also not a mass of consciousness (which is a characteristic of sushupti. By this, prājñā is rejected). It is not conscious of all objects simultaneously; it is not unconscious either. It is invisible, not susceptible to any kind of usage, not within the reach of any organ of action; it is beyond perception by any organ, beyond thought, and not to be indicated by any sound. In it there is only consciousness of the Self and there is a total cessation of the world as such. It is the embodiment of peace and of all that is good. It is the One without a second. This fourth state is turīya. Wise people consider this to be the Self. This Self has to realised.*

So'yamātmā'dhyaksharam omkāro'dhimātram pādā mātrā mātrās ca pādā akāra ukāro makāra iti.

8. *Here is that Self as the letters (A, U, and M) of Omkāra. It is also the mātrās (letters) in the Pādas (quarters). Pādas (quarters) are mātrās (letters), and mātras (letters)*

are pādas (quarters). A, U, and M are mātrās, like the pādas (of the Self).

Jāgaritasthāno vaiśvānaro'kārah prathamā mātrā "pterādīmatvād vā"pnoti ha vai sarvān kāmān ādi ca bhavati ya evam veda.

9. The waking state in which the Self is vaiśvānara is represented by A. Vaiśvānara and A are both all-pervasive. The seeker who knows this is sure to get all he desires. He is also the best among all.

Svapnasthānas taijasa ukāro dvitīyā mātrotkarshādubhayatvād votkarshati ha vai jñānasantatim samānaś ca bhavati nāsyābrahmavit kule bhavati ya evam veda.

10. Taijasa, the Self in the dream state, corresponds to U in Aum, for both occupy the middle position and share the same degree of importance. He who knows the sameness of the two excels in understanding and becomes a holy person. No one in his family is without the knowledge of Brahman.

Sushuptasthānaḥ prājñō makāras tritīyā mātrā miterapītervā minoti ha vā idam sarvam apītiś ca bhavati ya evam veda.

11. When the Self is prājñā--that is, when it is in dreamless sleep (sushupti)--it is represented by the third letter, M, in Aum. Prājña and M both stand where viśva and taijasa, along with A and U, end. Prājñā and M represent the gateway to dissolution into oneness. He who knows this knows the world and becomes its resting place.

Amātraś caturtho'vyavahāryaḥ prapancopaśamaḥ sivo'dvaita evamomkāra ātmaiva samviśatyātmanā'tmānam ya evam veda.

12. (As stated earlier,) the fourth quarter of Om is the cosmic Self. This Self is limitless, beyond thought and speech, non-dual, and all-good. The phenomenal world disappears into it. Wise people declare the individual self to be the cosmic Self. He who knows this merges his self into the cosmic Self. (He never again feels he is an individual self).

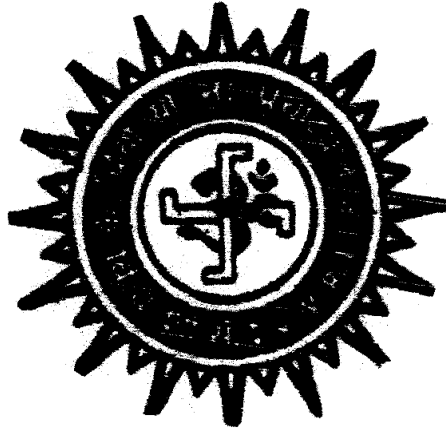
Iti Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣat samāptā. Here ends the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad.

From Swami Lokeshwarananda's translation of "Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, with Gauḍapāda's Kāriyā © published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029.

Om in Saguṇa Upāsanā

Svami Mukhyananda

*Our ancients personified Praṇava as Lord Gaṇeśa,
invoked first before beginning any enterprise.
So also, Gāyatrīmantra incorporates in it
all the ideas of Om symbolism.*



Om is symbolic of the entire existence, phenomenal as well as noumenal, macrocosmic as well as microcosmic, personal Īśvara as well as impersonal or trans-personal Brahman-Ātman.

Being the universal cosmic sound (the logos), the totality of all sounds, Om is called Praṇava (the primordial reverberating sound which fills the universe), from which, modified as the *ākāsha* (space/matter), the subtle and gross universe with all its entities and beings evolves in stages.

The graphic symbol of Om was, in course of time, further concretised and personified for purposes of *upāsanā* into the figure of the deity Gajānana (Gaja=elephant, ānana=face) or Gaṇeśa (the Lord of all Bhūta-gaṇas or cosmic elements: Īśa=Lord or ruler of the Bhūtas or elements, *gaṇa--group*).

All the holy and auspicious attributes and functions that were associated with Om from the Vedic times were transferred to him. His figure is a philosophic symbol to which suitable mythology was later added to explain his figure popularly.

We shall not go into the details of this highly interesting and profound cosmic

symbolism here, but only hint that Brahmāṇḍa is within him, and he stands transcending it. The similarity of the elephant-face and the figure of the Om is quite evident. He easily rides or controls the troublesome Māyā, represented by the small but mischievous mouse, his mount. All this is in keeping with the Hindu tradition of symbolically concretising and personifying abstract entities as already mentioned. Gaṇeśa is often referred to as *Om-kāra-svarūpa* (of the form of Om). We may also note here that in the Hindu pantheon all the deities have animals as their vehicles, signifying divine powers controlling animal tendencies.

Om in Spiritual Practice

By the mystic repetition of Om, one attunes oneself to the cosmic mind and is lifted up spiritually. By connecting oneself mentally to the cosmic reservoir through Upāsanā, one's mind becomes a conduit for the flow of inspiration from the cosmic mind. Hence it is considered the holiest *mantra* (mystic formula) for Japa (sacred repetition) and is, therefore, added at the beginning of all other *mantras* used for Japa.

Let us take two examples to see how the symbolism works psychologically:

1. The script we use for any language is nothing but an artificially contrived arbitrary device a set of symbols to record sounds. Still it helps us to store in books knowledge, which in itself is non-material. One who knows a language well and has learnt the particular script, to him is opened all the knowledge stored in all the books in that language, though he may still need the help of the learned. Similarly, if one knows the symbolism of Om, and all the ideas it represents, to him is open all the divine knowledge, which he may realise with the help of a guru.

2. Suppose we have forgotten the name of a person about whom we want to communicate to a friend. We begin to give various details and descriptions; still it may not give an adequate or correct idea of the person. The friend's mind being in doubt, he does not feel any attraction to him. On the other hand, suppose we utter the name of a person, say Sri Ramakrishna or Jesus Christ, immediately in the mind of a person who has intimate knowledge about him, the cumulative effect of all his knowledge brings about a sense of love and reverence. Then, if the context needs, he may begin to recount all the details of that great life.

Similarly, if a person has learnt all about the infinite supreme divinity from the scriptures and the guru and that Om is its designation, as soon as he utters Om all the greatness of that divinity and its wonderful manifestations come to his mind with a cumulative force and uplifts him. Then he may begin to contemplate on the details intensely and intimately, associating himself with it at all levels.

This intimate intense contemplation is called *upāsanā*, which literally means 'sitting or placing oneself mentally near' to the object of meditation. The psychological law is *Yat dhyāyati tat bhavati* (whatever one contemplates or meditates upon intensely, that he becomes). The more one recalls the name of a person whom he loves, the nearer one feels to him and dearer his vision of him [is his vision of him?]. Similarly, the more one repeats Om with the requisite attitude, the more one recalls the infinite supreme divinity, and feels close to it. Ultimately he realises his essential identity with it, since he is, as we saw, potentially the microcosmic counterpart of it.

In ritualistic worship the identification of the macrososm and microcosm is mentally visualised by a process called *nyāsa* which consists of touching different parts of the body while uttering the words of the cosmic counterparts. In *mānasa-pūjā* or mental-worship, also, symbolic identification is mentally contemplated.

The Gāyatrī Mantra

The Gāyatrī-mantra is the greatest prayer and *mantra* which incorporates all the ideas of the Om-symbolism. It is a prayer to the supreme infinite divine Reality for the enlightenment of the intelligence (*dhī*) of all human beings to enable them to realise the supreme Truth. It is also known as the *Sāvitrī mantra*, since it is addressed to the divine person in the Sun, (*Savitā*) who is considered as the visible symbolic representation of the supreme divinity. For, he destroys darkness and promotes life, and he is also identified with the inner Self of man. (*Īsa Upanisad*. 16-16).

Sāvitrī signifies that which is related to *Savitṛ* (*Savitā*) which means the source or originator of the universe, as well as the Sun. The *Sāvitrī mantra* composed in the *Gāyatrī* metre, occurs in the Vedas (*Ṛg-Veda*, III.62.10) and is considered to be their very essence.

Later on *Gāyatrī* was associated with Om, which is also considered as the source of the Vedas. Through this interconnection *Gāyatrī* was treated as the elaboration of Om. Om was prefixed to it along with the three *vyāhṛtis*, which are utterances of the divine Creator representing the three Cosmic planes, *Bhūr-Bhuvḥ-Svaḥ* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. V.14.1-8; and *Chāndogya Upanishad*. II. 23.2-3, III.12).

The *Gāyatrī mantra* in full, repeated mystically, runs as follows: *Om bhūr-bhuvaḥ suvaḥ, Tat-svaitur-vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayat.*

(Om, we meditate (*dhīmahi*) on the spiritual effulgence (*bhargas*) of that adorable supreme divine Reality (*vareṇyam devasya*), the source or projector (*savitṛ*) of the three phenomenal world-planes--the gross or physical (*bhūḥ*), the subtle or psychical (*bhuvaḥ*), and the potential or causal (*suvaḥ*), both macrocosmically (externally) and microcosmically (internally). May that supreme divine Being (*Tat*) stimulate (*pracodayat*)

our (*naḥ*) intelligence (*dhiyaḥ*), so that we may realise the supreme Truth).

In course of time, just as the Oṃkāra was personified into Gaṇeśa, the *Gāyatrī-mantra* also was personified into the Goddess Gāyatrī (Gāyatrī-Devī), as the presiding deity of the *mantra*, for purposes of personal *upāsanā* (*saguṇa-upāsanā*).

Swami Mukhyananda is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna order and has many published books to his credit. The present article is condensed from his book "Om, Gayatri and Sandhya," © published by the Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras-4.

Viśvāmitra Gāyatrī



Traditionally, the Viśvāmitra Gāyatrī is a part of the Sandhyāvandan of the *dvijas*. Embedded within the Gāyatrī is the entire process of doing the *japa* together with the *sañkalpa* or *dharana* [?], Oṃkāra being the heart of the *mantra*.

Thus the Viśvāmitra Gāyatrī can be divided into three parts: 1. Mantra Om. 2. Process Bhūḥ, Bhuvaḥ, Svaḥ or Om Bhūḥ, Om Bhuvaḥ, Om Svaḥ, Om Mahaḥ, Om Janaḥ, Om Tapaḥ, Om Satyam. 3. Sañkalpa *Tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*.

There are two methods of doing the Viśvāmitra Gāyatrī:

1. The Om to begin and end in the same *chakra* wherein *chakrashuddhi* takes place, as a consequence of which *bhūta shuddhi* is achieved and all the organs falling within the purview of the *chakras* begin to perform at their optimum level, keeping the Sādhaka in good health.

2. When the Oṃkāra is done beginning in the *mūlādhāra* to culminate in the *mahān* of the Sahasrāra complex, all possible obstructions within the *sushumnā* are cleared for the passage of the *kuṇḍalinī* through the *sushumnā* and merge into the Para Shiva in the *mahān*.

The *chakras* involved in the *japa* are Mūlādhāra or Bhūḥ; Svādhishthāna or Bhuvaḥ; Manipur [?] or Svaḥ, Anāhata or Mahaḥ; Vishuddhi or Janaḥ; Ājñā or Tapaḥ, and Sahasrāra complex or Satyam.

The Sahasrāra or the Satyaloka is made up of 1. Chitta Chakra 2. Buddhi Chakra 3. Mahānda 4. Dhī Chakra or Nirvāṇa 5. Visarga made up of Nāda and Nādānta 6. Guru Chakra 7. Sahasrāra of 1016 petals and 8. Mahān where lies Para Shiva.

When the Om is made to travel from Mūlādhāra to Ājñā, the Sādhana is known as Dīrgha-nāda or Prathama-nāda Sādhana, and, when the Sādhana is done in the Sahasrāra

complex it is known as Madhyama-nāda or Dvitīya-nāda Sādhana.

It is to be noted that the second *nāda* ends in the Dhī Chakra from where onwards the Om takes up the form of pure light which is called the Tritīya-nāda or the Rhasva-nāda. When the Sādhana of Om is done in each Chakra, the process is also called as the Rhasva Om or Prathama Rhasva Om, that is, Om to begin and end in the same Chakra.

It is in the above context that Viśvāmitra Rishi has said that Om moving through the Chakras from Bhūḥ to Svaḥ and hence to Satyaloka lights up the universe (within man) with a brilliance comparable to the Sun and that may this brilliance spread throughout creation engulfing all.

H. G. Bhat.

Praṇava Sādhana

B. KUTUMBA RAO

Our ancients had a way of saying a great deal in a few words. Om is an instance of this for it contains a whole philosophy which it would take many volumes to expound.



The word Praṇava means *prakarsheṇa navaḥ*, extremely new, because it is eternal, all-pervading and immutable. Like Brahman it illuminates all the universe.

Secondly, it is a means for the attainment of Para Brahman or Śivahood, and it is identified with the effect because there is no difference between a cause and its effect. Hence it is also called Brahman. (*Om ityekāksharam Brahma*)

Praṇava is of two kinds--Para and Apara--noumenal (object of intuition devoid of all phenomenal attributes) and phenomenal. The former is *Sat-chit-Ānanda*, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute. In short, it is Para Śiva himself.

Apara Praṇava is phenomenal. It is of the form of Śabda, otherwise known as Śabda-Brahman.

Once Prajapati did a three-year penance, meditating on Parama Śiva. And with the blessing of Parama Śiva he created the earth, mid-region and heaven. He then churned them. From the churning arose three elements--from earth, *agni*, from mid-region *vāyu* and from heaven *sūrya*. He churned further and produced *Rg*, *Yajus* and *Sāma*. They were churned again, which resulted in three *vyāhṛtis*, *bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ* and *suvaḥ*.

From these arose again three letters *a*, *u*, and *m*, with the effulgence of a million suns. Prajapati combined them into one letter which became the indicator of Brahman.

Consent Word

When people intend to say that they know a thing, they say "Om" instead of saying 'I know'. Compare the *Chāndogya Upanishad* statement *Tadvā etatd anujñāksharam yaddhi kiñca anujānāti Om ityeva tadāha* (Whosoever desires to convey his consent says "Om").

In sacrifices also, all the four priests express their assent by saying 'Om'.

For the *mantra* Om, Brahmā is the Rishi, Gāyatrī is the metre, Paramātmā, named Śambhu, is Devatā, Akāra with Bindu is the Śakti. *Akāra and makāra are the seed letters*. Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya are the Munis Gāyatrī[?]. The three letters are red, white and black in colour. Waking, dreaming and deep sleep are the three states. Earth, mid-region and heaven are the three places, *udātta, anudātta and svarita are the svaras*. Morning, midday and evening are the divisions of the day. Satva, Rajas and Tamas are the *guṇas*. Creation, sustenance and destruction are the three activities.

He who performs Praṇavajapa, in the prescribed manner, ten lakh times with devotion, is sure to achieve success. He can command all the powers like *stambhana and ākarshaṇa* and attain all the *vibhūtis*. Most importantly, he is freed from all sins and gets liberated.

Scientific Religion

In the *Praṇavakalpa*, found in *the Skandapurāṇa*, some other ancillary rituals, common to all *mantras*, are indicated. One is also enjoined to recite *Oṃkāra, Panjaram, [?]* *Oṃkārakavaca, Oṃkāra Hṛdaya, Praṇavāksharamālā, Praṇavagīta* and *Praṇava-sahasra-nāma* which are also given therein.

Earlier it was said that Praṇava denotes all concepts and is all-pervasive like Brahman. Sir John Woodroffe's remarks are worth noting in this context: "The ancient Hindus had an aptitude much to be appreciated in these often verbose days of saying a great deal in a few words. The *mantra* 'Om' is an instance. For this short syllable contains a whole philosophy which many volumes would not suffice to state--an Eastern philosophy, I may add, which is gaining increased support from Western science. These two will be, before long, reconciled when the latter has cast aside, what a friend calls, the habit blinkers. The beneficial result will, it is hoped, be a science which is religious and a religion which is scientific." (*Garland of Letters, p. 216*)

According to Tantrik method, a *sādhaka* should pronounce the word 'Om' as long as he can, the higher the sound particle goes the subtler it will be, and he should concentrate his ears and mind on those subtle sounds until absolutely no sound is heard. This is 'Niśśabdam' or silence. At this stage, the *sādhaka* almost attains a temporary *samādhi*, sees

radiance and enjoys bliss.

What we call Nāda generally is a complex of Bindu, Ardha Chandra (crescent), Rodhini, Nāda, Nādānta, Śakti, Vyapika, Samana, and Unmani [?]. Bindu shines like a lamp in the midst of forehead and is round in shape. Above that is half moon (crescent). It is similar to moon both in shape and lustre. Above this is Rodhini in triangle form and is like moon light.

Nāda resembles a ruby (Padma-rāga) and appears like a nerve placed between two eggs, that is, a vertical line between two zeros. Nādānta is like lightning and resembles a plough with a Bindu attached to its left. Śakti resembles a nerve rising out of the left of two juxtaposed Bindus. Vyapika has the form of a Bindu and a triangle with its apex resting thereon. Samana is of the form of two Bindus placed one above the other with a line connecting them. The same without upper Bindu is Unmani. Above this lies the Mahābindu *Varivasyā Rahasya*.

Though this process mainly is related to Śrī Vidyā Upāsanā this can be applied as well to the Upāsanā of Oṃkāra.

The Oṃkāra is called Śabda Brahman by the grammarians who are called *sphota-vādins*. They have a special process of meditation of Vāk in its four states of manifestation. Thus there is an important place for Oṃkāra both in Saguṇa and Nirguṇa Upāsanās.

B. Kutumba Rao is a scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu with many published works to his credit.

Realising Ātman



This *Ātman* cannot be realised through sharp intellect. Neither can it be realised by the study of all the sacred texts, nor by a clear exposition of the truths contained in them. The *Ātman* reveals itself to him who intensely longs for it. (lit. whom it chooses). The *Ātman* cannot be realised by one who is devoid of inner strength and it cannot be realised by any sporadic spiritual endeavour. For, by these alone inner strength, alertness in spiritual pursuits, and a regulated spiritual discipline under a spiritual master the *Ātman* is realised.

Reaching the supreme state, the sages become satisfied with spiritual knowledge. They have fulfilled themselves. They are calm and are free from all desires. These wise ones always feel the presence of the Supreme Brahman in all beings, under all conditions. Being united with the *Ātman*, they realise their oneness with all beings.

The knowers of Brahman, who live absorbed in it, who are ever established in that awareness by long meditation on Vedantic texts, and whose minds are purified by the practice of self-abnegation, are freed from all bondages. They have become Brahman, are immortal and free, even while living, what to speak of their immortality or freedom after death !

Muṇḍaka Upanishad

Tattvāloka is a periodical. Originally it was published from Mumbai. Later on it was transferred to Chennai, we believe. A special number of this valuable journal was exclusively devoted to Praṇava. We got permission to reproduce it. We worked on it. It was recomposed. However, we could not release it because of our preoccupation with OM: One God Universal in various other aspects. Now it has been recovered and placed on our Home Page. It runs to 52 pages. It can be read in our Omshanti Home Page.

It will also be made available on OMKARADARSHANA Yahoo group forum.

OMLN

The Mystic Syllable 'OM' in the Vedas

By

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Several native papers on Indology surface repeatedly like volcanoes in the oceans of Western wisdom. But in the heart of eastern earth, fire isn't enough even to continue these topics already set ablaze a century ago.¹⁹

How words are analyzed in dubious details just to belie the reality²⁰ and why these deliberations are amiss for the Vedic logogram are the two questions to be answered no more.

From ancient history²¹ to recent science²² whatever belongs to us is either borrowed or imitated – at least in their opinion. But whatever they write, they are right, even if they write:

.....Founder, Colonel Boden stated most explicitly in his will (dated August 15, 1811) that the special object of his munificent bequest was to promote the translation of the scriptures into Sanskrit, so as to enable his countrymen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to Christian Religion.²³

To such an intention how much credibility can be assigned? The same work assures its readers that *Om* appeared in the Upanishads for the first time.²⁴

¹⁹ Ascertaining age of the Vedas by Bal Gangadhar Tilak (*Orion* :1893).

²⁰ Age of the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* : the debate over 'na cyavante', (kāṇḍa II): *History of Indian Literature*. Vol. I. by Maurice Winternitz. English translation. Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, p. 277.

²¹ Harappan civilization as a colony of the Sumerians: *Indus Valley Civilisation and beyond* , by M. Wheeler (In Indus Valley a 400-lettered alphabet was used while Sumerians used a 900-lettered one. Such a retrogressive evolution of culture is historically neither possible nor postulated by the author but overlooked instead).

²² Prof. J.C.Bose demonstrated wireless transmission over a range of 80 km. just before Guglielmo Marconi was declared its inventor.

²³ *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, by Monier Monier-Williams. Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1990. p. ix of preface.

²⁴ *Ibid.* text p. 235.

Our scrutiny must start far behind where the verb root \sqrt{chad} in the Vedas shows the two senses of covering²⁵ and pleasure²⁶ and though both the senses are acknowledged the derivative word *chad* is wantonly attached to the latter one.²⁷

If the former sense were incorporated along with, the westerners couldn't brand the grammatically unexplained verses as "a Hindu fetish for superstition sake" or "a literary nonsense accepted traditionally" or "a gibberish passage most probably meant for conjurations" etc.

It's [!] said and agreed that grammar and English didn't make Shakespeare but instead Shakespeare made the grammar and English of own and for all. His name is available in six signatures—all spelt differently by himself. And that too is advertised proudly enough!!

But the Vedas though they are compiled from several seers' work over a long period of thousands of years must agree verbatim in all their grammatical aspects to satiate the western acumen. On the contrary, far back from Yāska²⁸ and Patañjali²⁹ upto today's treatises^{30,31} we Indians accede:

*Rṣīṇām punarādyānām vācam artho 'nudhāvati.*³²

About these "assumed" explanations, three objections are generally raised. First of all, why did the Vedic seers circumlocute? To fulfill the purpose of concise statement and curbing the knowledge within own disciples, such formulations are customary since the time immemorial. The second idea still prevails among orthodox Indian literati in several fields of traditional knowledge.

²⁵ *Marmāṅgī te varmaṅgā chādayāmi. Rgveda, VI. 75. 18.*

²⁶ *Chandayase havam Rgveda, VIII.50.5.*

²⁷ *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, by Monier-Williams, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1990. The main text p. 404.

²⁸ The double-headed bull. *Rgveda* (V.58.3) explained in *Nirukta* XIII.1.8.

²⁹ The five Rgvedic verses explained grammatically (viz. IV.58.3, I. 164.45, X. 71.2, VIII.69.12, X.1.4). *Mahābhāṣya* I. 1.1.

³⁰ *Vedic mathematics*, by Bharati Krishna Tirtha, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi.

³¹ The Vedic seers knew the velocity of light: *Sāyana-Bhāṣya* of the Rgvedic verse I.50.4. They knew its wave nature as well, : Prof. R Krishnaswamy (*The Astrological Magazine*, May 1992. Raman Publications, Bangalore).

³² *Uttararāmacaritam*. I. 10.

Secondly, if these very purposes were intended by the Vedic seers, why they remained unravelled in otherwise elaborate explanations of the Brahmaṇas and the Āraṇyakas? A two-pronged reasoning is there to answer it.

Firstly, all explanations under the two afore-said headings are meant only for rituals. Secondly, this whole present lot represents only a part of originally propounded elucidations.³³

In the modern age of world-wide communication and awareness, the genetic theory of inheritance given by Gregor John Mendel (1866) remained in oblivion for 34 years until Hugo de Vrice of Holland, Karl Currens of Germany and Eric Von Tschermak of Austria rediscovered it independently (1901). Accordingly, after attenuation of *guru-paramparā* of the Vedic seers, there is no gainsaying the loss of those myriads of meanings given thousands of years ago.

Now remains the last remark. If one can call the same glass half-filled or half-empty, why these Vedic “circumlocutions” can’t be read and understood differently? While raising such suspicions, it must be remembered that out of several possible analyses, the most ancient one best approximates the Vedic seers in its age and idea. That’s why Yāska and his predecessor Śākapūṇi³⁴ are relied rather than a Western wild goose chase.

Coming back to the context, *chanda* comprises the sense of covering³⁵ and thereby its allegory and symbolism are explained. Even the Vedic verses give glimpses of multiplicities³⁶ and mysticism³⁷ in their own expressions. Now it’s not impossible to see the seed of seven *vyāhṛtis* with the eighth *om* in the Vedic phraseology *ṛtvijām aṣṭamam śūram*.³⁸

³³ The *Rgveda* (21), *Yajurveda* (101), *Sāmaveda* (100), and *Atharvaveda* (9) have 1131 branches taken together *Paṣpaśāhnika*. Now-a-days only 16 available.

³⁴ Omīteṣa vāgiti Śākapūṇiḥ quotes Yāska in his *Nirukta* XIII. 10. Even the most pristine Vedic grammar of Śaunaka. *Rgveda Prātisākhya* mentions *Omākāra Paṭalam*. Chapter 15.

³⁵ *Yadebhiracchādayapracchandasām Chandastvam. Chāndogya Upaniṣad. 1. 4.2.*

³⁶ *Vacobhīrokam santam bahudhā kalpayanti. Rgveda X. 114. 5.*

³⁷ *Kaschandāsām vogam ā veda. Rgveda X. 114. 9.*

³⁸ *Yasmin devā adhi viśveniśeduḥ yas tan na veda kim ṛcā karisyati. Rgveda I. 164. 39. cf. The merger of gods in om : Chāndogya-Upaniṣad. 1. 4. 3.*

The word *udgātha* occurs several times in *Ucchiṣṭa* hymn³⁹ which was later ascertained as a synonym to the mystic monosyllable.⁴⁰ Even some indirect hints of its symbolic presence in the Vedas was explained in the great glossary of Yāska.

For example, the verse *catvāri vāk*⁴¹ denotes *om* and the three mahāvyaḥṛtis⁴² while the other verse *rico akśare*⁴³ indicates it alone. In the latter context Yāska has quoted a former grammarian Śākapūṇi.

On the same line, the verse *suṣṭubhā*⁴⁴ can be parsed as: *sa vipraiḥ śaraṇyubhiḥ navagvaiḥ stubhā, sa saptasvareṇa daśagvaiḥ suṣṭubhā svaryaḥ Indra! Śakra! phaligam balam adrim raveṇa darayaḥ.*

Accordingly, it will be translated as given ahead “by nine inwardly excited and mutable senses, He is adorable. He is to be applauded and more adored in the seven-fold voice that’s *vāk* – the tenth sense. O mighty Indra cleave the hard underwater rock roaringly.

Analogically⁴⁵ we can well imagine that here the hard-hitter is the same *om* which cleaves the so called underwater rock symbolizing the Supreme being—a hidden, but hard truth.

³⁹ 21 *Atharvaveda*, XI. 7. 5.

⁴⁰ *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*. 1. 5. 1.

⁴¹ *Rigveda*. I. 164.45.

⁴² *Oṃkāra mahāvyaḥṛtāyascetavārsam. Nirukta XIII* . 1. 9.

⁴³ *Rigveda*. I. 165. 45.

⁴⁴ *Rigveda*. I. 62. 4.

⁴⁵ *Praṇava dhanuḥ saro hyānnā brahma tallakṣyam ucyate . apranatten veddhavyam bhavet. Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*. II. 2. 4.

The Sacred Syllable OM

By Georg Feuerstein



The Meaning of Om

There is no question that *om* is the oldest *mantra*, or sound of numinous power, known to the sages of India. Its origin, however, is somewhat obscure. A century ago, the German scholar Max Müller, editor and translator of the *Rig-Veda*, had the idea that *om* might be a contraction of the word *avam*, a prehistoric pronominal stem, pointing to distant objects, while *ayam* pointed to nearer objects. He continued, *Avam* may have become the affirmative particle *om*, just as the French *oui* arose from *hoc illud*. This obscure comment refers to the fact that *om*, in addition to its sacred significance, came to be used in the prosaic sense of “Yes, I agree.” Müller’s interesting philological speculation remains unsubstantiated, however.

More recently, a different approach was taken by Swami Sankarananda, who proposed that *om* derives from the Vedic word *soma*. Through the influence of the Persians, who did not pronounce the letter *s*, the word *soma* was changed to *homa* and subsequently was shortened to *om*. Like Müller’s derivation, this is pure con-jecture, but is nonetheless intriguing, as it brings out the traditionally accepted relationship between *soma* and *om*.

Soma is the sacred substance used in the principal Vedic sacrifice. It has been characterized as an intoxicant, and various scholars have, in my opinion, wrongly identified it as a concoction prepared from the fly agaric

mushroom. In the Vedic literature, *soma* is always described as a creeper, which cannot be said to apply to a mushroom. Be that as it may, the real *soma* was not a plant or plant extract but a spiritual elixir, or illuminating experience, as is evident from certain hymns of the *Rig-Veda* (e.g. 10.85.3). In this sense, we also encounter it in later Tantra, where *soma* stands for an inner process or esoteric phenomenon: the nectar of immortality said to ooze from the Moon at the *tâlu-cakra* (palate wheel) in the head, dripping into the “Sun” stationed at the *nâbhi-cakra* (navel wheel). On the physical level, it corresponds to the saliva, which is known to have antiseptic, healing properties.

Swami Sankarananda believed that, like *soma*, the sacred syllable om represents the Sun. This seems to be confirmed by the *Aitareya-Brâhmana* (5.32): *om ity asau yosau [sûryah] tapati*, “That which glows [i.e., the Sun] is om. The Sun was indeed central to the Vedic spirituality, and the Vedic sages looked upon the Sun not merely as a star that supplies our planet with the necessary light and warmth but as a multidimensional entity of which the visible stellar body is merely its outermost material shell.

The esteemed Swami’s conjecture is worthy of deeper consideration. However, most spiritual authorities regard *om* as the vocalization of an actual “sound,” or vibration, which pervades the entire universe and is audible to *yogins* in higher states of consciousness. In the Western hermetic tradition, this is known as the “music of the spheres.” The Indian sages also speak of it as the *shabda-brahman* or “sonic Absolute,” which, in the words of the *Chândogya-Upanishad* (2.23.3), is “all this (*idam sarvam*).” What this means is that *om* is the universe as a totality, not a conglomerate of individual parts, as we experience it in our ordinary state of consciousness. Thus *om* is the primordial sound that reveals itself to the inner ear of that the adept who has controlled the mind and the senses.

Vihari-Lala Mitra, in the introduction to his translation of the *Yoga-Vâsishtha*, equated the Greek word *on* (being) with om. While this is linguistically unsustain-able, philosophically the connection is valid, as *om* is the symbol of That Which Is, or *Brahman*. He also made the link between *om* and *Amen* to which the same strictures apply.

The Early History of the Sacred Syllable

Significantly, the syllable *om* is not mentioned in the ancient *Rig-Veda*, which has recently been dated back to the third millennium B.C.E. and earlier still. However, a veiled reference to it may be present in one of the hymns (1.164.39), which speaks of the syllable (*akshara*) that exists in the supreme space in which all the deities reside. “What,” asks the composer of this hymn, “can one who does not know this do with the chant?” He adds, “Only those who know it sit together here.” That is, only initiates gather to delight in the mystery of the sacred syllable and the company of the deities.

The word *akshara* means literally “immutable” or “imperishable.” This designation is most appropriate, since grammatically syllables are stable parts that make up words. In the case of the mantric *om*, this monosyllable came to represent the ultimate One, which is eternally unchanging (*akshara, acala*). The term *akshara* is used as a synonym for *om* in many scriptures, including the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (10.25), which has Krishna say, “Of utterances I am the single syllable.”

In light of the early prominence given to *om* as the primordial seed sound, there is no good reason for assuming that the sagely composers of the Vedic hymns were ignorant of the sacred syllable *om*. Indeed, they were great masters of *mantra-yoga*, and the Vedic hymnodies are the astounding creation of their mantric competence. Possibly *om* was considered so sacred that it could not be mentioned outside the actual context of the Vedic sacrifices. In that case, it would have been passed on from teacher to student by word of mouth in strictest confidence. There would therefore have been no need to mention *om* in the sacred hymns. All initiates would have known it and also understood its sublime meaning. In any case, for countless generations, any recitation of the Vedic hymns has begun with the syllable *om*. The *Atharva-Veda* (10.8.10) seems to hint at this with the following riddle:

What is joined to the front and to the back and is joined all around and everywhere, and by which the sacrifice proceeds? That praise (*ric*) I ask of you.

The syllable *om* is often appended to longer mantric utterances, both introducing and concluding them, and this practice is very old indeed.

As time went by, the ban on uttering the sacred syllable or even writing it down outside the sacrificial rituals was relaxed. Thus the sacred syllable is first mentioned by name in the opening hymn of the *Shukla-Yajur-Veda* (1.1), the white recension of the Vedic hymnody dealing strictly with the performance of the sacrifices (*yajus*). This could be a later addition, however. For the *Taittirîya-Sam-hitâ* (5.2.8), which is appended to the *Yajur-Veda*, still cryptically speaks of the “divine sign (*deva-lakshana*) that is written threefold (*try-alikhita*) [*trayî-likhita?*].

Some scholars have seen this as a reference to the three constituent parts of the syllable *om*, as written in Sanskrit: *a + u + m*. The three constituents of *om* are referred to, for instance, in the *Prashna-Upanishad* (V.5). The symbolic elaboration of this is found in the *Mândûkya-Upanishad*, as we will see later.

That the sacred syllable was written down early on is clear from the fact that it had to be traced in sand or water during certain of the ancient rituals. This is also a significant piece of evidence in favor of writing at least in the late Vedic era, which is generally denied by historians.

However, today we appreciate that ancient Indian history needs to be completely rewritten. The long-held belief that the Vedic people invaded India between 1200 and 1500 B.C.E. has been shown to be unfounded. In fact, all the evidence points to the identity between the Vedic people and the builders of the great cities along the banks of the Indus river. Since inscribed artifacts have been found in the Indus cities, the question of whether or not the Vedic people knew writing can be conclusively answered in the affirmative.

It is true, though, that the Vedic hymnodies were in all probability never written down until comparatively recently. Yet, the *brahmins* had devised an ingenious system of memorization to guarantee that the *Vedas* were preserved with utmost fidelity. It appears that they have been successful in this, thanks to the prodigious memories of the Vedic specialists. Other cultures, which held their sacred tradition in a similar high regard, sought to preserve it by memorization rather than writing it down on impermanent materials that, moreover, might fall into the wrong hands. However, nowhere has the art of memorization reached the sophistication that it did in India.

Over many generations, *om* was not uttered outside the sacred context of ritual worship. It was a secret sound communicated by word of mouth from teacher to disciple, that is, originally from father to son. Even the early *Upanishads* (which have recently been dated back to the second millennium B.C.E.) often still refer to it only indirectly as the *udgîtha* (“up sound”) and the *pranava* (“pronouncing”). The former word hints at the nasalized way in which *om* is sounded out, with the sound vibrating at the psychoenergetic center located between and behind the eyebrows (i.e., the *âjñâ-cakra*). The term *pranava* is derived from the prefix *pra* (etymologically related to the Latin “pro”) and the stem *nava* derived from the verbal root *nu* meaning to “call out” and “to exult”). It is used, for instance, in the *Yoga-Sûtra* (1.27), where it is called the symbol (*vâcaka*) of the Lord (*îshvara*). Patanjali further states (in 1.28) that in order to realize the mystery of the Lord, the *om* sound should be recited and contemplated.

Another, later term for *om* is *târa*, which is derived from the verbal root *trî*, meaning “to cross, traverse.” This is a reference to the liberating function of the *om* sound, which safely transports the *yogin* across the ocean of existence (*bhava-sâra*) [*bhava-târa*?] to the “other shore.” Through recitation, which is mindful repetition of the *om* sound, the *yogin* can transcend the mind itself and thus is freed from the illusion of being an insular being separate from everything else. The *om* sound is truly liberating because it expands the reciter beyond the physical boundary of the skin and beyond the metaphorical boundary of preconceptions, thus restoring the recognition of the universal Self as his or her true identity.

In the earliest *Upanishads*, such as the *Brihad-Âranyaka*, *Chândogya*, and *Taittirîya*, the sacred syllable *om* is mentioned many times by name, both as *om* (or *aum*) and *om-kâra* (“*om* making,” meaning the letter *om*). However, *udgîtha* is more common. It is the *Chândogya* that first clearly spells out the equation between the words *udgîtha* and *pranava* (a term not found in the *Brihad-Âranyaka*). Perhaps these two terms came in vogue because for unknown reasons *om* had, by that time, spread beyond the sacred domain and begun to be used in the sense of “Yes, I agree.” The first record of this usage is in the *Brihad-Âranyaka-Upanishad* (3.9.1) itself, where *om* is employed seven times in this manner. Indeed, the *Chândogya-Upanishad* (1.1.8) clearly states: “That syllable is a syllable of assent, for whenever we assent to anything we say *aum* [= *om*]. Max Müller commented on this as follows:

If, then, *om* meant originally *that* and *yes*, we can understand that, like Amen, it may have assumed a more general meaning, something like *tat sat*, and that it may have been used as representing all that human language can express.

The *Chândogya-Upanishad* (1.1.9) also has this relevant passage:

By this the threefold knowledge proceeds. To honor this syllable, *aum* is recited, *aum* is exclaimed, *aum* is chanted, with its greatness and essence.

Interestingly, in his commentary on this *Upanishad*, Shankara takes this passage to refer to the *soma* sacrifice, which again affirms the connection between *om* and *soma* mentioned above. He states that the *soma* ritual is performed to celebrate, or honor, the sacred syllable, which is the symbol of the Divine. This sacrifice, he further explains, maintains the Sun from which proceeds all life and nourishment by means of warmth and rain.

The *Chândogya-Upanishad* (1.9.4) also quotes Atidhanvan Shaunaka, the teacher of Udara Shândilya, as saying, “So long as your descendants will know this *udgîtha*, their life in this world will be the highest and best.” This expresses the idea that the sacred syllable is a blessing for those who utter it. For this reason it is worthy of being held in the highest esteem, as this and other scriptures emphasize.

According to the concluding verses of the *Brihat-Samnyâsa-Upashad*, a text of the medieval period--12,000 recitations of *om* remove all sins, while 12,000 recitations daily for a period of one year bring realization of the Absolute (*brahman*). What greater blessing can there be than this?

From Om to Aum

At least two millennia after the sacred syllable *om* was discovered by the Vedic seers (*rishis*), the anonymous sage who composed the brief *Mândûkya-Upanishad* utilized this age-old *mantra* to expound the metaphysics of Advaita Vedânta. Thus he explained the three constituent parts (*mâtrâ*) of the syllable namely --*a* + *u* + *m* as symbolizing past, present, and future, as well as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. He also spoke of a fourth part that

transcends the other three and concluded his esoteric observations with the statement that *om* is the Self (*âtman*), saying, “He who knows this enters the Self with the self--indeed, he who knows this!

The importance of the *Mândûkya-Upanishad* can be gauged from the fact that the venerable sage Gaudapâda wrote his celebrated commentary entitled *MândûkyaKârikâ* on it, which was subsequently commented on at length by Shankara, the great preceptor of the school of nondualism (*advaita*). Gaudapâda was the teacher of Govindapâda, Shankara’s guru.

Another scripture, given exclusively to explaining the sacred syllable *om* is the *Atharva-Shikhâ-Upanishad*. This scripture begins with the question: What should one meditate on? The answer is: the syllable *om*, which symbolizes the supreme Absolute (*brahman*). The text speaks of four constituent parts of this *mantra*, each having its own symbolic correlations as follows:

1. the sound *a* -earth *ric* (hymn of praise) *Rig-Veda* Brahman Vasus (a class of eight deities) *gâyatrî* meter -*gârhapatya* fire red -dedicated to Brahman;
2. the sound *u* atmosphere -*yajus* (sacrificial formula) -*Yajur-Veda* -- Vishnu Rudras (deities governing the region between earth and heaven) *trishtubh* -meter *dakshina* fire -bright -dedicated to Rudra;
3. the sound *m* -heaven -*sâman* (sacred chants) *Sâma-Veda* -Vishnu Âdityas (deities connected with the Goddess Aditi, symbolizing primordial infinity) -*jagatî* meter -*âhavanîya* fire -black -dedicated to Vishnu;
4. “half-part” (*ardha-mâtra*) Atharvan songs -*Atharva-Veda* fire of universal destruction -Maruts (deities of the mid-region who are especially associated with the wind) -*Virât* -lightning-like and multi-colored -dedicated to Purusha.

The most important part is the nasalized “half-part” sound *m*, which brings its own illumination and causes the life force (*prâna*) in the body to rush upward into the head. This *Upanishad* further states that the *om* sound is called *om-kâra* because it sends the currents of the life force upward (*ûrdhvam utkrâmayati*) and that it is called *pranava* because it makes all the

life currents bow down (*pranâmayati*) before it. The text concludes by stating that the *om* sound is Shiva.

Interestingly, in Tantra-Yoga, the serpent power (*kundalinî-shakti*) resting in the psychoenergetic center at the base of the spine is said to be coiled up three and a half times. Very likely, this captures the same idea as in the notion of the three and a half units of the *om* sound. The Tantras would presumably modify the *Upanishad's* final claim to replace Shiva with Shakti, which in the form of the *kundalinî* rises upward and while doing so assimilates the life currents. In fact, the ascent of the serpent power is accompanied by manifestations of ever more subtle sound.

According to the *Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad* (4), only the silent part of the sound *m* leads to the soundless, invisible Abode, the ultimate Reality. This scripture explains breath control (*prânâyâma*), a very important aspect of yogic discipline, as the recitation of the *gâyatrî-mantra: tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhîmahî dhiyo yo nah pracodayât*). This mantra is to be recited together with the *pranava* and the *vyâhritis* (“formulaic utterances,” notably the words *bhûh bhuvah svah*, standing for “earth,” “mid-region,” and “heaven” respectively). This sacred *mantra* should be recited three times in a single breath.

The *Amrita-Nâda-Upanishad* (2ff.) recommends that one should mount the chariot of the *om* sound, make Vishnu one’s charioteer, and steer steadily toward the ultimate Reality. As one approaches the supreme Self, one should abandon the chariot and enter the splendor of the Self by means of the unsounded letter *m*. This is the silent, subtle part of *om*. This *Upanishad* prescribes breath control, especially retention of the breath, as a means of controlling the senses and focusing the mind upon the inner world. It defines Yoga as the state of restraint over a period of twelve units or measures (*mâtrâ*), that is, twelve recitations of *om*. It promises the dawning of wisdom within three months of diligent and continuous practice, an inner vision of the deities within four months, and final liberation within a mere six months. Of course, one must be able to sustain unwavering concentration for that span of time in order to succeed. For most people, this is an impossibility. For, as one Vedic seerbard (*rishi*) complained in the *Rig-Veda* (10.33.2), “My mind flutters here and there like a bird.”

According to the *Dhyâna-Bindu-Upanishad* (15), the *pranava* is the bow, oneself is the arrow, and the Absolute is the target. This metaphor is first

found in the *Mundaka-Upanishad* (2.2.3-4). It also calls the *pranava* imperishable and states that its “fine end” cannot be expressed. Another favorite metaphor, also recapitulated in the *Dhyâna-Bindu-Upanishad* (22), is that of oneself as the lower churning stick (*arani*) and the *om* sound as the upper churning stick. By practicing it, one can restrain one’s breath and dissolve the subtle sound (*nâda*).

Through constant cultivation of the subtle inner sound, declares the *Nâda-Bindu-Upanishad* (49), the karmic imprints (*vâsanâ*) left by our past volitional activity are eradicated. This leads to the merging of mind and life force. When the mind and the life force are motionless, the person abides as the subtle sound known as *brahma-târa-antara-nâda*, which can be translated as the “innermost sound that is the brahmic liberator (*târa*).”

A fascinating account of the sacred syllable is given in the *Nârada-Pari-vrâ-jaka-Upanishad* (8.1ff.), a medieval scripture. Here *om* is said to be threefold: the destructive *om*, the creative *om*, and the internal-and-external *om* (comprising the two former types). Another threefold division is: the brahmic *om*, the internal *om*, and the practical *om*. Then the text mentions two more sets: the external *om*, the *om* of the seers (*rishi*), and the virât *om* (consisting of the former two), as well as the destructive *om*, the Brahma *om*, and the *om* of the half-measure (*ardha-mâtrâ*).

This *Upanishad* goes on to explain these various forms of *om* as follows: The internal *om* is the single syllable *om*, which has eight parts--*a*, *u*, *m*, *ardha-mâtrâ*, *nâda*, *bindu*, *kalâ*, and *shakti*. The phoneme *a* is said to consist of 10,000 parts, the phoneme *u* of 1,000 parts, the phoneme *m* of 100 parts, and the *ardha-mâtrâ* of an infinite number of parts. The creative *om* is described as having qualities and the destructive *om* as having none. The virât *om* is said to consist of sixteen units (morae). In addition to the above-mentioned eight parts (which are explained below), the sacred syllable also has *kalâ-atîta*, *shânti*, *shânti-atîta* (written *shântyatîta*), *unmani*, *mananmanî* (written *manomanî*), *purî*, *madhyamâ*, *pashyantî*, and *parâ*. This text also refers to 64 and 128 parts of the sacred syllable, but it makes the point that ultimately its designated object the -Absolute -is singular.

The Sacred Syllable *Om* in the Tantras

The above Upanishadic ideas lead to the speculations about *om* in the Tantric literature where concepts like *nâda*, *bindu*, *kalâ*, *shakti*, etc. abound. The *Shâradâ-Tilaka-Tantra* (1.108) describes the cosmogonic process in terms of the production of sound as follows: From the supreme Shakti -pure Consciousness combined with the factor of lucidity (*sattva*) -comes the most subtle sound (*dhvani*), which is marked by a preeminence of the factors of lucidity and dynamism (*rajas*). Out of the *dhvani* develops the subtle sound (*nâda*), characterized by a mixture of the factors of lucidity, dynamism, and inertia (*tamas*). This subtle sound, in turn, gives rise to the energy of restriction (*nirodhikâ*), which has an excess of the factor of inertia. This ontic principle emanates the “half-moon” (*ardha-indu* written *ardhendu*), which at this lower level again shows a predominance of the factor of lucidity. Out of it comes the vibratory source point (*bindu*), the immediate source of all letters and words. These form *mantras*, which are thus manifestations or vehicles of Shakti.

This scripture (1.8) further explains that the *bindu* is itself composed of three parts, viz. *nâda*, *bindu*, and *bîja* (seed). The first part has a predominance of Consciousness (i.e., Shiva), the second a preponderance of Energy (i.e., Shakti), and the third an equal presence of Consciousness and Energy. Such esoteric accounts of the evolution of sound remain relatively unintelligible outside of Tantric practice; however, they become increasingly meaningful as the practitioner makes progress on the path of *mantra-vidyâ* or “mantric science.”

The primordial sound is uncaused. In the language of Kashmiri Tantrism, it is pure vibration (*spanda*). According to the *Kirana-Tantra* (copied in 924 C.E.), *om* resides in the throat of Shiva and is the Divine itself. This scripture also describes it as the root of all *mantras*, stating that upon articulation it becomes *vâc* (speech), corresponding to the Greek concept of *logos*.

As we get higher up the ladder of ontic unfoldment, we encounter ever more subtle energies. Thus the *mâtrikâs* are the subtle alphabetic counterpart to their corresponding audible sounds; the *bindu* is subtler than the *mâtrikâs*, and the *nâda* is still more subtle. As the *Yoga-Shikhâ-Upanishad* (2.21) states, “There is no *mantra* higher than the *nâda*. In old graphic representations of the *om-kâra*, the *nâda* symbol is drawn or painted as an inverted crescent

above the *bindu*, which suggests that the *nâda* is prior to the *bindu*. Later the crescent placed below the *bindu* emphasized that the *nâda* contains the *bindu*. Both graphic representations make the same point, however.

The *nâda* itself has various levels of subtle manifestation. According to the *Hamsa-Upanishad* (16) it manifests in ten different ways. First there is the sound *cini*, then *cini-cini*. The third sounds like a bell, the fourth like the blast of a conch, whereas the fifth has the quality of a harp sound. The sixth through the ninth respectively resemble the sounds of cymbals, flute, kettle drum, and tabor. Only the tenth type, which is like a thunder clap, should be cultivated. Various physiological symptoms are said to accompany these sounds. Thus when the fourth sound is heard (in the right ear), one's head begins to shake, while the fifth sound causes the subtle center at the root of the palate to stream with the lunar ambrosia, and so on. The final sound alone is accompanied by identification with the supreme Absolute (*para-brahman*).

Some *Tantras* differentiate between *mahâ-nâda* (also called *nâda-anta*) and *nirodhinî*, which is transmuted into *bindu*. This is also called *tri-bindu* because it is subdivided into *nâda*, *bindu*, and *bîja*. In this case, the *nâda* is correlated with *shiva*, the *bindu* with *shakti*, and the *bîja* with both *Shiva* and *Shakti*. The ultimate Reality itself can be viewed as a point origin, and as such is sometimes referred to as *para-bindu* or transcendental germinal point.

Om is the ultimate *bîja-mantra*. The idea of *om* being the root of other mantras may actually have given rise to whole idea of *bîja-mantras*, which are root sounds associated with particular deities. They are special high-potency sounds or vibrations giving direct access to the spiritual realities for which they stand. The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhitâ* (71) calls *om* the “best of all mantras,” adding that all other mantras receive their power from it. Thus *om* is prefixed or suffixed to numerous mantras:

Om namah shivâya. “*Om*. Obeisance to Shiva.”

Om namo bhagavate. “*Om*. Obeisance to the Lord [Krishna or Vishnu].”

Om namo ganeshâya. “*Om*. Obeisance to [the elephant-headed] Ganesha.”

Om namo nârâyanâya. “*Om*. Obeisance to Nârâyana [Vishnu].”

Om shânte prashânte sarva-krodha-upashamani svâhâ. “*Om*. At peace! Pacifying! All anger be subdued! Hail! (Note pronunciation: sarva krodhopashamani)

Om sac-cid-ekam brahma. Om. The singular Being-Consciousness, the Absolute.

The *Mahânirvâna-Tantra* (3.13) calls the last-mentioned *brahma-mantra* the most excellent of all *mantras*, which promptly bestows not only liberation but also virtue, wealth, and pleasure.

The *para-bindu* mentioned above is said to have a masculine and a feminine side, which are respectively called *ham* and *sa*, thus yielding the sound or word *hamsa*, meaning swan, but signifying the sound of the breath and indeed the breath itself as it enters and leaves the body. This natural motion of breathing, which is calculated to occur 21,600 times every day, is called spontaneous recitation (*sahaja-japa*) or unrecited recitation (*ajapa-japa*).

The *hamsa* also stands for the psyche (*jîva*), which lives through the breath. This spontaneous *mantra* is understood as *so'ham* or "I am he," that is, "I am Shiva, the ultimate Reality." But ignorance prevents us from realizing this; hence the need for spiritual practice. The *Yoga-Bîja* (156), a comparatively late Hatha-Yoga text, states that when the *prâna* enters the central channel, the natural *mantra* reverses itself from *hamsa* to *so'ham*. Experientially, however, this is not different from the primordial *om*, the root *mantra* that reverberates through the entire cosmos.

The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhitâ* (73) has this stanza:

When people hear the *pranava* they hear the Absolute itself.

When they utter the *pranava* they go to the abode of the

Absolute.

He who perceives the *pranava* sees the state of the Absolute.

He who always has the *pranava* in his mind has the form of the Absolute.

Conclusion

This brief discourse on the history and nature of the sacred syllable *om* is meant to give the reader a better appreciation of the metaphysical complexities surrounding this age-old *mantra* and of some of the profound spiritual practices associated with it. It would be possible to write several volumes on this subject, just as it would be possible to provide an overview of India's spiritual traditions based solely on the theory and practice of the *om*

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sound. What has been presented here is but a minute fraction of the teachings about *om* developed over a span of five millennia.

The Yoga tradition is very rich and immensely sophisticated; yet its various schools and their respective paths are at core very simple, and in their simplicity they have many features in common. Above all, they lead to the same goal, which is the transcendence of the ego-personality, however this may be conceived and expressed in words. As the Rig-Veda (1.164.46) declared five millennia or more ago, “There is a single Truth but the wise call it by different names.”

AUM TAT SAT

Notes

(1) M. Müller, *Three Lectures on the Vedânta Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), p. 116.

(2) Ibid.

(3) See Swami Sankarananda, *The Rigvedic Culture of the Pre-Historic Indus*, (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1942), p. 75.

(4) See V.-L. Mitra, *The Yoga-Vasishtha-Maharamayana* (Calcutta: Bonnerjee and Co., 1891), vol. 1., p. 39. Apparently, Mitra got this idea from Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of Brahma Samaj.

(5) Ibid., p. 46. In linking *om* with Amen, Mitra took his cue from the great Sanskrit scholar Rajendra Lala Mitra.

(6) See, e.g., G. Feuerstein, S. Kak, and D. Frawley, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization: New Light on Ancient India* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1996).

(7) M. Müller, op. cit., p. 116.

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8. The Svastika and the Omkāra.

By HARIT KRISHNA DEB.

[With Plates II-IV.]

On these two themes there exists a considerable body of literature with very little of which I can claim acquaintance in any degree. But, so far as I know, scholars are not yet unanimous regarding the origin and significance of the sacred symbol called *svastika*; and no one seems to have connected the symbol with the mystic syllable *om*. I propose to show that there are indications enabling us to identify the symbol with the syllable; that, in fact, the sign of *svastika* represents the sound of *omkāra*.









The syllable *om*, also called *udgītha* or *praṇava*, is part and parcel of the Vedic religion, and the question of its origin early occupied the minds of the Indo-Aryans. In Aitareya Brāhmaṇa V. 32, for example, it is related that Prajāpati, after his meditation had brought into existence the three Vedas, meditated again on them with the result that from the Rgveda arose *bhūr*, from the Yajurveda *bhuvah*, from the Sāmaveda *svah*. Upon further meditation on these three products, three letters were brought forth, namely, *a*, *u*, and *ma*. Prajāpati combined the letters, and *Om* was born. The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa (Chap. 1) has much to say regarding the mystic syllable, and, looking at it more from the viewpoint of meaning than from the viewpoint of grammatical form, connects it with \sqrt{ap} , so that the syllable is held to signify 'attainment of everything' (*rūpasāmanyād-arthasāmānyan-- nedīyas-tasmād-āper-omkārah sarvam-āpnōtīy-arthah*). One of the earliest Upanishads, the Chāndogya, asserts at the outset of its disquisition that the *udgītha* is the quintessence (literally, 'the eighth essence') of the universe and is also the object of worship *par excellence*. It is even claimed (Chānd. I. 4. 4.) that the *devas* became immortal and free from fear by resorting to the syllable *om*. Later Upanishads eulogize the syllable with increasing elaboration. 'The place of knowledge of the Veda is taken by meditation on that word which "all the Vedas proclaim to us" (*sarve vedā yatpadam-ānamanti*), the *praṇava*, i.e. the sacred syllable *om*.'¹

The antiquity of the *svastika*-mark in India likewise goes back at least to the days of Pāṇini, who is now thought by

¹ Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 392.

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many scholars to have lived in the 7th century B.C.¹ Pāṇini refers in his Grammar (VI. 3. 115) to the practice of marking cattle with the svastika-symbol.² The svastika has long been a favourite emblem with the Jains whose traditions represent it as having been the special sign of Supārsvanātha,³ a Tirthaṅkara who is said to have flourished considerably anterior to the period of Mahāvira (died 528 B.C.).⁴ One at least of the gold-leaf ornaments associated with the Piprāhwā vase containing the relics of Buddha is embossed with a svastika.

There are two principal forms of the svastika: (1) that with the arms turned to the right, and (2) that with the arms turned to the left. Analysing each of these two forms we find it composed of two identical elements,  or , superposed cross-wise. We are at once reminded of the Brāhmī o which is written  or  in the earliest known Indian inscriptions. The idea suggests itself that the svastika is composed of nothing but two Brāhmī o's crossing each other. It will be recalled that in pronouncing the praṇava in course of recitation of the Vedic texts, the o-sound is lengthened; and there can be little doubt that Vedic texts, handed down orally with wonderful textual accuracy through thousands of years, are recited in India now nearly as exactly as of yore⁵. Pāṇini teaches the same thing in his rule *om-abhyādāne* (VIII. 2. 7.), and the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa (1. 17) also says: *tisromātrā abhyādāne hi plavate*. If, therefore, this long sound of o was required to be represented alphabetically, the sign for o would need to be repeated. The repetition might be indicated by writing two o's one after the other: but such a device seems to have been repugnant to the scriptal scheme of ancient India; for two identical vowels have never, I think, been found placed side by side in that way in her antique records. Such a mode of representation would, besides, be cumbersome and in conflict with the requirements of symbolism. The other and simpler method of representation of the long sound of o, which may be called the monogrammatic method, would consist in placing two o's crosswise, giving rise to the forms  and  (according as  or  was taken to stand for o) which are precisely the principal forms of the svastika. [See Plate II.] To complete this alphabetic representation of the omkāra, pronounced with a nasal at the end, a *ma* or some other nasal would have to be added on to

¹ V. A. Smith, *Oxford History of India* (1919), p. 57.

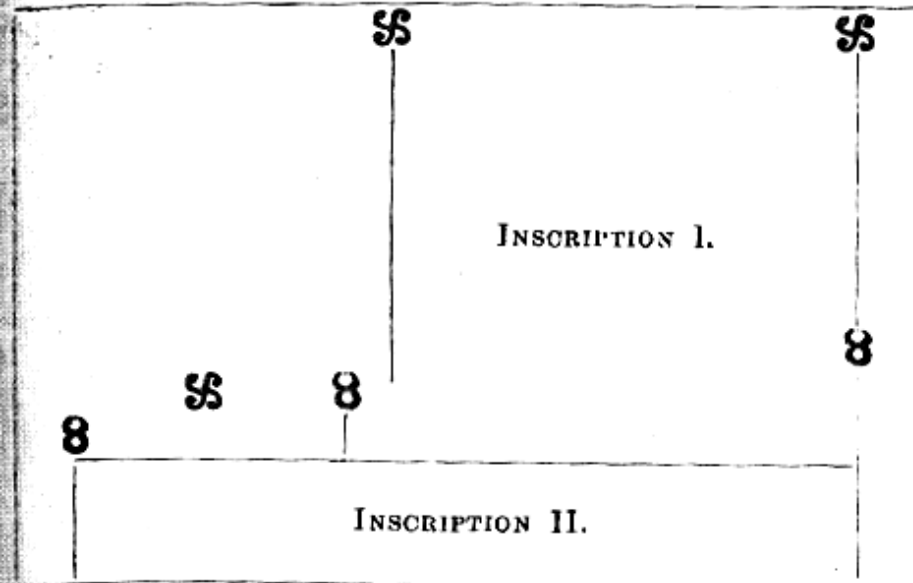
² *The Svastika*, by Thomas Wilson (Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1894), p. 772.

³ Jagamanderlal Jaini, *Outlines of Jainism* (Cambridge, 1916), table facing p. 6.

⁴ Traditional date, which I see no reason to doubt.

⁵ Cf. Kielhorn in *IA*, V. p. 144.

the svastika. This is exactly what we find on some of India's oldest coins upon which the svastika appears with a Brāhmi *ma* (hitherto supposed to denote the 'taurine symbol') attached to each arm.¹ *Ma* is also associated with the svastika-sign in the Jaugada version of the two 'Separate Edicts' of Aśoka wherein are inscribed three svastikas with three *ma*'s as in the following diagram²:—




Coming down to the first century B.C., we find the svastika figuring in the records of Ushavadāta and Sātakarṇi, and the

¹ See Plate II, 1, 2; Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India*, p. 101 (D), Pl. XI, 20; other instances of svastika in company with *ma* interspersed *passim*. Cf. Rapson, *Coins of Andhr-as, etc.*, p. clxxv (1). Cf. also D'Alviella, *Migration of symbols*, p. 71, where reference is made to a coin supposed to belong to Apollonius ad Rhyndacum showing a svastika flanked by four crescents which recall the Indian *candra-bindu*. Even to this day, the usual Jaina practice is to place above the svastika a *candra-bindu* along with three *bindus* (dots) corresponding, apparently, to the four *ma*'s of ancient coins. Association of the *candra-bindu* with the svastika is to be met with in sculpture belonging to a mediæval Jaina cave-temple at Khandagiri wherein may be seen five panels forming a group and depicting in relieve the following figures in succession: (1) *mayūra*, (2) *haṁsa*, (3) *padma*, (4) svastika, (5) *candra-bindu*. This combination reminds us of the fact that *haṁsa* and *padma* figures in conjunction with the svastika on early Grecian vases; see Plate IV for illustrations, also discussion *infra* on the Upanishadic ideas involved in such combinations.

² Cunningham, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, Pl. XIII. C.'s remarks at p. 20 of this work first suggested to my mind the possibility of the svastika and the Brāhmi *ma* being together identifiable with *om*. When I communicated the idea to Sir John Woodroffe, he seemed to like it; and his attitude, I am glad to acknowledge, encouraged me to study the subject in some detail.

same auspicious mark occurs at the beginning of many an epigraph belonging to a period not much later, sometimes in conjunction with the expression *siddham* signifying 'attainment.' In Kushān epigraphy, the svastika is rarely met with, inscriptions now generally commencing with the expression *siddham* which reminds us of the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa explanation of *om* as *sarvam-āpnoti*.

During the Gupta period, and through some subsequent centuries, inscriptions often begin with a symbol which would appear to have been related in form to the svastika. Leaving aside forms which may be regarded as variants, slightly abridged or elaborated, the mediaeval symbol exhibits shapes closely resembling the Brāhmī *o*'s which go to make up the svastikas found in the Jaugada inscription of Aśoka; the one noticeable difference being the additional spiral attached to a terminus in each case.¹ The mediaeval symbol has been interpreted as an expression of omkāra by modern scholars who, as my friend Mr. N. G. Majumdar informs me, infer this identity from the substitution, in later analogous records, of the syllabic *om* in place of the mediaeval symbol. This ground for the inference is strong enough: it is made stronger still by a statement in Alberuni's *India* (I. 173)¹ that 'the figure ' was used by the Hindus for *om* (about 1030 A.D). Alberuni remarks that the Indian people use the sign, 'believing that it will bring them a blessing.' It seems that, even so late as Alberuni's time, the Hindus had not forgotten the relation of the 'figure' for *om* to the sign called svastika which literally means 'that which signifies well-being', 'that which brings blessings.' We may note also that mediaeval and later inscriptions often use the expression *svasti* just after *om*, and sometimes only *svasti* or only *om*. The interchangeable character of these expressions argues their identity in meaning. The fact that the svastika-sign of the earlier records gave place, in the mediaeval age, to a symbol which in form was often little else but the svastika dichotomized, followed optionally by the expression *svasti*, and which in later times bloomed forth into a syllabic omkāra, justifies at once the name *svastika* applied to the sign and the view that it signified nothing but the omkāra.

Sometimes, more often than not, the svastika-symbol appears without an accompanying *ma* or anything denoting the final nasal. This at first sight seems to go against its identification with the syllabic *om*. But if we recognize brevity to be the basis of symbolism, the difficulty vanishes. By way of illustration we may refer to the case of the sacred monogram

¹ Sometimes the symbol is little more than a spiral. [See on this point the Supplementary Note *post.*]

Chi Rho (X). That monogram, found on early Christian coins and figured by Constantine on his standard, represents, as is well known, the first two letters of the Greek word *Xpistos*, the other letters being left out to be supplied to the mind by suggestion. If five letters out of a total of seven could thus be omitted from the Christian symbol, the omission of the final *ma* of *om* from its symbolic representation in the shape of a svastika will not appear strange. From the alphabetical standpoint, the Indian symbol was simply *o*; but, symbolically, it represented the omkāra.

Outside India, the svastika is found dispersed on a very large scale, almost throughout the world. In England, the svastika has been known as the *fylfot*,—a word taken by the earlier etymologists to mean 'four-footed' or 'many-footed.' Although the New English Dictionary challenges this derivation, I am inclined to accept it in view of the fact that the omkāra is described in Upanishadic literature as *catuspāda* or 'four-footed.'¹ The earliest undoubted occurrence of the svastika is said to be in connexion with the Third City on the site of Hissarlik, identified with ancient Troy. It is common also in the Fourth and Fifth Cities on the same site, and is principally found there on spindle whorls. Its most luxuriant expression, however, is to be met with on Grecian vases of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries B.C.²

There were many varieties of the svastika already in those remote ages. I am ill-equipped to deal with all of them and with the associated emblems and figures. But some points deserve special notice here as being particularly relevant to my present thesis. The svastika-types may be classified under two broad divisions: (1) the plain svastika, 'right-handed,' and 'left handed,' and (2) the 'ogee' svastika, or svastika with spirals attached to the arms, also 'right-handed' and 'left-handed.' A most remarkable feature on a few Greek vases is the occurrence of a number of what would appear to be Greek 'M's by the side of the svastika.³ This association of the Greek 'M's with the svastika on ancient Greek vases recalls the association of the Brāhmī *ma* with the svastika in lithic and numismatic records of ancient India, and seems to bear confirmatory testimony to the presence of a nasal element in the mystic combination. The dots which occasionally appear in conjunction with the svastika should, I think, be likewise interpreted as corresponding to the nasal *bindu* of the Indian alphabet.

¹ Mr. Van Manen, of the Imperial Library, although doubtful about the older etymology, admits that it is more satisfactory to the mind.

² Wilson, *The Svastika*. See also Plates III and IV.

³ *Ibid.*, Figs. 27, 14^o, 176.

Figures of *hamsa* and *padma* are frequently depicted on these vases.¹ Sometimes it is a large svastika with two hamsas on two sides accompanied by two rows of 'M'-like signs. Sometimes a conventional padma occupies the centre of the field, with two hamsas on two sides and a number of svastikas dispersed in the field. Arrow-heads placed in échelon, obviously indicating an arrow in motion, also figure on some of these vases, sometimes in conjunction with the hamsa and occasionally in company with the padma. On a Cyprus vase is 'represented an arrow-head, stemmed, barbed and suspended by its points between the svastika.'² Other animals besides the hamsa are also depicted on the vases, such as the ram, the antelope, the horse, the lion, just as on some old Indian coins³; and these animals are considered by some authorities to point to the solar significance of the svastika,⁴ an interpretation which has found eminent advocates armed with a goodly array of arguments.

I think it is possible and proper to explain some of these features with reference to ideas formulated in the Upanishads. Hamsa stands there for the Brahman-Ātman. The padma reminds us of the Upanishadic notion, that the heart is shaped like the lotus (a comparison found also in the Atharvaveda) and is the abode of Brahman or even Brahman himself.⁵ In Mundaka, II. 2. 4, the praṇava is described as 'the bow off which the soul as the arrow flies to Brahman', and Maitr, VI. 24, represents it as 'the arrow which is shot from the body as bow in order to pierce the darkness.'⁶ Perhaps, too, the horse has reference to the *āsvamedha* or horse-sacrifice with which the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad begins, 'in order to recognize in the steed the universe into which Prajāpati is transformed with the object of again offering himself in sacrifice.'⁷ The presence of 'solar' animals is well accounted for by the supposition that they are counterparts of the Upanishadic conception that 'all living creatures are Brahman,'⁸ and of the idea, broached even in the Aitareya Brahmana V, that the praṇava is identical with the Sun; the Chāndogya (I. 5. 1) goes so far as to represent the āditya praṇava as making the sound *om* in its motion.

These explanations presuppose an early existence, in the Grecian world, of a system of philosophy, centering round the svastika, which was closely akin to the system of philosophy, centering round the omkāra, as expounded in the Upanishads. The supposition has much to support it. That ancient Greek philosophy offers many points of resemblance to ancient

¹ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

² *Ibid.*, p. 850.

³ Cunningham, *C.A.I.*, Pl. III, Nos. 1 and 2.

⁴ Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 784-5.

⁵ Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

ent Indian philosophy has long been recognized; and the receptive temperament of the early philosophers of Hellas is borne witness to by the traditional attribution of the travelling tendency to Greek philosophers like Thales and Pythagorus. Strabo, quoting from Megasthenes, notes that the opinions of Indian philosophers 'coincide with those of the Greeks on many points,' such as the nature of the soul, the origin of the world, the diffusion of the Deity through the universe.¹ Modern scholars have acknowledged the 'coincidence.' Dr. L. D. Barnett speaks of 'the singularly close parallel between Upanishadic thought and the doctrines of early Eleatic philosophers, and especially Parmenides, who may well have been contemporary with the authors of some of the most important Upanishads.... Except in his view of Being as a sphere, Parmenides is in perfect accord with the Vedānta. The similarity of Plato's doctrines is well known.'² Dr. Richard Garbe would go a step further and compare the theory of Thales regarding the genesis of the world from a primeval water with the similar Vedic notion.⁵ The equivalence of the svastika to the omkāra will add to these analogies, and will appear to be particularly impressive when considered with reference to Strabo's quotation from Megasthenes alluded to above.

To the question: What was the significance of the vase-paintings? the find spots of the vases will help us to give an answer. According to Mr Walters, 'the great majority of these vases have been found in tombs, and some important discoveries have been made on the sites of temples and sanctuaries.'⁴ The same scholar observes that 'vases (though not necessarily painted ones) must have played a considerable part in the religious ceremonies of the Greeks,' and further says that 'their most important use, and that to which their preservation is mainly due, was in connexion with funeral ceremonies.'⁵ It will seem reasonable, therefore, to look upon the vase-paintings exhibiting the svastika-mark as possessing a religious and a spiritual significance, more specially the latter, — a view confirmed by the ancient hut urns and cinerary urns of central Italy which often bear the svastika symbol.⁶ In other words, these paintings are realisations, in colour and outline, of notions pertaining to the philosophy of the Greeks which, in its earlier stages of development, could not have been divorced from their religious and spiritual notions inasmuch as even Plato who flourished in the 4th century

¹ McCrindle, *Ancient India*, 1901, pp. 66-7.

² Barnett, *Brahma-Knowledge* (London, 1907), pp. 34-5.

³ Garbe, *Philosophy of Ancient India* (Chicago, 1899), p. 33.

⁴ Art. 'Ceramics' in *Encycl. Britt.*, 11th ed.

⁵ *Ibid.* ⁶ Wilson, *op. cit.*, figs. 183, 185, 186.

B.C., is admitted by modern authorities to have fused together logic and physics, psychology, theory of knowledge and metaphysics, in a semi-religious synthesis. We have merely to recall Colebrooke's remark that 'the philosophy of India may be employed for a commentary on that of Greece' in order to perceive the entire propriety of viewing the Grecian vase-paintings in the light of the Upanishads. Of the svastika in particular, as part of these paintings, we cannot urge that it is a mere design, ornamental and meaningless: its position on many of the vase-paintings violates the principle of symmetry which is otherwise discernible as being predominant in these compositions and appears to have been determined in many cases in relation to different portions of the body of the animal in association with which the sign occurs.

No doubt has been entertained in regard to the point that some of the earlier Upanishads preceded the Buddha (died 544 B.C.).¹ They attest, therefore, the existence, in India about 650 B.C.,² of omkāra worship in a highly mature form. We may speak similarly of a svastika-cult at its climax about 600 B.C. in the Hellenic world, to judge from the evidence of vases.

The earlier Greek vases represent what may be called the 'classical' phase of the svastika-cult; for the svastika often figures there as the motif of the compositions which are usually restrained, simple and majestic.³ Later, the svastika begins to figure less prominently, but not less suggestively; the composition becomes more complex, and perhaps more fanciful, bespeaking what may be termed the 'decadent' phase.⁴ Decadence has already declared itself on vases assigned to the sixth century B.C. Corresponding phases of the omkāra-cult may be seen in the Upanishads. In the Chāndogya, for instance, the cult appears to have passed through a distinct stage of evolution and must already have had a long history behind it. But the Māndūkya betrays a pronounced development in the direction of 'decadence.' The 'decadent' stage must have commenced before the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, since many of the philosophical notions associated with omkāra-worship are found to form the material out of which these two religions are made. In fact, if the Upanishads, enjoining the worship of omkāra, represent a revolt

¹ Traditional date, adopted by Dr. Vincent Smith in his *Oxford History*.

² *i.e.*, more than a hundred years before Buddha's death; cf. Rapson, *Ancient India* (Cambridge, 1916). p. 181. Some scholars incline to earlier dates. The ideas systematically put together in the Upanishads must have existed long before the Upanishads were composed, as pointed out by Mr. Hirendra Nath Dutt and other scholars.

³ *e.g. ibid.*, figs. 27, 28, 140; cf. figs. 185, 186.

⁴ *e.g. ibid.*, figs. 147, 162, 170, 171, 172.

against the Vedic religion of rituals, Jainism and Buddhism should be looked upon as rebel offshoots of a religion which had, in its pursuit of knowledge and in its anxiety to maintain connexion with the older religion, attached exaggerated importance to what might with reason be regarded as a mere word, ignoring, to all intents and purposes, the practical utility of an ethical system. The flourishing period of the omkāra-cult in India synchronizes in this way with the flourishing period of the svastika-cult in the Grecian world. The synchronism is highly suggestive and cannot be overlooked in its relation to the identity of the svastika with the omkāra.

But a serious objection to the supposed sacred character of the svastika as employed by pre-historic man has been enunciated by Mr. Thomas Wilson who, after a most careful examination of the vast literature on the subject, has come to the conclusion that, since 'we find the Swastika used on small and comparatively insignificant objects, those in common use, such as vases, pots, jugs, implements, tools, household goods and utensils, objects of the toilet, ornaments, etc., and infrequently on statues, altars and the like,' 'all pretense of the holy or sacred character of the Swastika should be given up, and it should (still with these exceptions) be considered as a charm, amulet, token of good luck or good fortune, or as an ornament or decoration.'¹ I have shown above that the vases were not 'comparatively insignificant objects,' but, on the contrary, had definite religious and spiritual associations. As regards tools, implements and the Trojan spindle-whorls, the ancients may have actually worshipped them. In India it is a common practice with artisans to worship the implements or instruments which help them in their work.² Lastly, in the case of objects of the toilet, ornaments, etc., those of them that bear the svastika-mark may have formed part of the ceremonial 'treasures' which in olden times used to be buried with the dead,—a custom alluded to in the Chāndogya Upanishad (VIII. 8. 5) as characterizing the Asuras; or, some of them may have been votive offerings, since archæological research has proved that, amongst people affected by what is known as 'Aegean civilisation, it was a common thing to dedicate to a deity articles of personal use.

It need not be denied, however, that svastikas might, even in ancient times, make their appearance on objects unconnected with tombs or temples, the adoption of the device having been quite conceivably conditioned by a half-reverential, half-aesthetic impulse such as actuates modern men and women to adopt it on buttons and brooches. Many

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 951-2.

² I am indebted to my friend Kumar Sudhindrachandra Sinhasarma for suggesting the parallel.

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originally sacred emblems have degenerated into mere ornamental designs. The sanctity of the svastika was liable to be forgotten soon in areas far away from the locality of its origin. It is a significant fact that the symbol has retained its holy association longer in India than elsewhere, except perhaps in Lapland and Finland.

The proposition that the svastika is composed of two Brāhmī o's involves the assumption that the Brāhmī o could exist prior even to the 13th or 14th century B.C. to which date, approximately, the Trojan spindle-whorls bearing developed forms of the svastika-mark have been assigned.¹ This assumption goes against the theory, advocated by Bühler, that the Brāhmī script was derived about 800 B.C. from a Semitic source.² Bühler has, no doubt, succeeded in tracing a remarkable resemblance between certain letters of the ancient Semitic alphabet and old Brāhmī letters of corresponding phonetic values, e.g. in the cases of *ga* and *tha*. In many cases, however, the analogies emphasized by him seem to be too far-fetched, e.g. in *ca*, *ma* and *ya*. We must, therefore, as a recent writer remarks,³ consider Bühler's theory unconvincing. Cunningham's theory of a hieroglyphic native origin⁴ was rather summarily dismissed by Bühler on the ground that no trace has been found of the use of hieroglyphs in ancient India, and much stress was laid by Bühler on the circumstance that, in ancient times Brāhmī used to be written, like Semitic, from right to left. Professor D. R. Bhandarkar⁵ has recently claimed a pre-historic origin for the Brāhmī alphabet on the strength of marks, very similar to Brāhmī letters, found on an object assigned to the 'neolithic' age, and the arguments he has advanced are by no means easy to challenge. Mr. Bhandarkar, however, has not attempted to explain the few resemblances between the Brāhmī and the Semitic scripts. Perhaps, for that attempt time is not yet. But it does not seem impossible that some Brāhmī letters are of early indigenous origin, while other letters of the alphabet may have been adopted or adapted from foreign, perhaps Semitic, originals. A tradition preserved by Alberuni⁶ relates that, during the dark ages preceding the Great Civil War, the Hindus had become illiterate, and Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara, rediscovered the akṣaras by divine inspiration. The alleged rediscovery points to a deliberate attempt having been made in early times to reconstruct the lost or nearly lost script in India; and it

¹ I am not aware if this dating has been confirmed by the latest archaeological researches.

² *Indian Studies*, III, and *Indian Palaeography*.

³ *Encycl. Britt.*, I, p. 732.

⁴ *Inscr. of Asoka*, Pl. XXVIII.

⁵ *Calcutta Review*, Jan. 1920, pp. 21-39.

⁶ *India* (Sachau), I, pp. 171-2.

may well have been the case that contemporary foreign models were consulted in this work of reconstruction. The Brāhmī script, as we find it about 500 B.C., bears in its elaboration an evident impress of the academician's hand,—a fact admitted by Bühler.¹ We do not know how much may have been due to 'the learned Brahmans' in the framing of the script. But it seems to me that they were intellectually quite equal to the task of devising, at any rate, some letters independently themselves. It is in any case manifest that the theory of a late and Semitic origin of the Brāhmī script carries with itself its own burden of proof, and that burden is as yet far from being discharged. We have no evidence, therefore, against the assignment of a sufficiently antique origin to the Brāhmī *o* which, I claim, was made the basis of the svastika symbol.

A weightier objection would be that the proposed explanation takes it for granted that the Brāhmī *o* could retain its shape unchanged during more than a thousand years (c. 1500-500 B.C.). Ordinarily, in the post-Aśokan period, we find a progressive palaeographic change in Indian scripts through successive centuries. The letter *o* itself has changed considerably since the days of Aśoka. Could it have remained much the same 500 B.C. as 1500 B.C.? This, I submit, is quite within the limits of possibility. As Prof., Bhandarkar² says; "Some of the pre-historic symbols found in Egypt and referred to a period anterior to 5000 B.C. have been found to be identical with some of the alphabetical signs of the Phoenicians, e.g. which have been assigned to Circa 900 B.C.—showing thus an interval of four milleniums. Coming to this country do we not find that the letter *g*, e.g. of the inscription on the relic-casket of the Piprahwa Stupa which may be ascribed to about 500 B.C. has survived in that exact form to this day in the modern Kanarese script?" The Brāhmī letters employed in Ceylon inscriptions in the first century B.C. are almost identical with those prevailing two or three hundred years earlier.³ In Kharoṣṭhī palaeography, again, we do not discover, except in a few letters, any radical change between Aśoka and Kanishka. It is well known, too, that the Tibetan script has remained stationary since the eighth century A.D., with only a few slight changes.⁴ Possibly, these latter instances of stagnation illustrate the inability of scripts to grow and develop when transplanted bodily to foreign soil; but they also suffice to prove the capacity of alphabetical forms to resist, sometimes, the forces that make for change. Finally, we must bear in mind that palaeographic progress is likely to have been slower in those remote ages than in later times since the art of writing was presumably less extensively practised in the earlier

¹ *Ind. Palaeog.* (Eng.), p. 17.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

³ Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*, p. 445

⁴ *Ep. Ind.*, xi p. 271.

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period. It cannot, therefore, be asserted that the form of the Brāhmi *o* 1500 B.C. must have been decidedly different from its form 500 B.C. In fact, it was precisely in centuries prior to 500 B.C. that *oṃkāra*-worship enjoyed a vigorous life, so that the letter *o* would, during those centuries, be looked upon more as a sacred emblem than as a letter and would consequently suffer little change.

That the svastika was foreign to Troy, having been introduced there about the middle of the second millenium B.C., follows directly from the circumstance that the sign is not found in the First and Second Cities on the Hissarlik site, but suddenly emerges *in a variety of forms* in the Third or 'burnt' City.¹ The question, therefore, arises: What is the link connecting 'Troy' of such an early age with the Vedic religion and its concomitant, the *oṃkāra*? Fortunately, Professor Winckler's discoveries at Boghaz Kuei have already supplied the link. It is now positively known that about 1400 B.C. kings with Indo-Aryan names and worshipping Vedic gods were ruling in the region of Mitanni.² The names *Sutarna*, *Dushratta*, etc., have a distinctly Indo-Aryan appearance; and it is instructive to compare the name *Gilukhipa*, borne by a daughter of Sutarna I, who was also queen of Amenophis III of Egypt (c. 1400 B.C.), with the name *Guruksepa*³ borne, according to the *Viṣṇu Purāna*, by the third successor of Bṛhadbala of Kośala who had fallen in the Bhārata war not very many years before Amenophis.⁴ Ample evidence has been secured which goes to show that there was intimate intercommunication at that period among the different peoples inhabiting Asia Minor, Egypt and the Aegean islands, so that the Vedic religion obtaining in Mitanni had many opportunities for circulation abroad. Earlier still, Mitanni had been the centre of an extensive empire, and the migration of the svastika symbol to Troy in those days is intelligible enough. The infiltration of Vedic ideas into Cyprus and other countries could not have been long delayed; and the process appears to have been reinforced later by a stream of thought represented by the earlier Upanishads. The fifteenth century B.C. thus assumes, like the sixth century B.C., a special importance from the standpoint of world-history.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE.

Since this paper was written, the July (1920) number of the *J.R.A.S.* has reached Calcutta. The number contains

¹ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 810.




² C. H. W. Johns, *Ancient Assyria* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 54.

³ Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, p. 9.

⁴ The *Purānas* place the war 1015 or 1050 years before Mahāpadma who was crowned, according to my calculations based on Puranic data, 413 B.C.

an article by Prof. Sayce on the origin of the Semitic Alphabet. According to the learned writer, the problem of the Semitic alphabet has been in a large measure solved. 'The use of the Egyptian hieroglyphs as alphabetic letters suggested to some Semitic genius the employment of them to represent the initial sounds of the Semitic words with which they corresponded. Once the alphabet had been formed its development varied in different parts of the Semitic world'

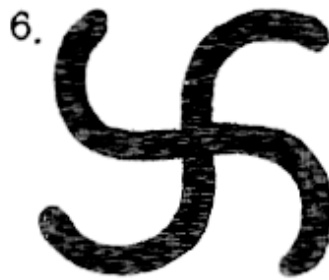
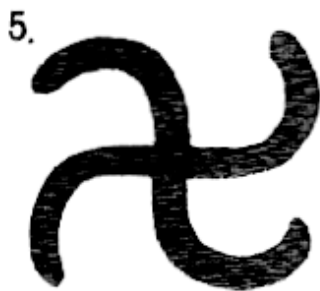
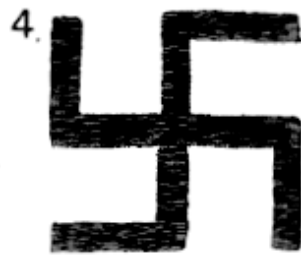
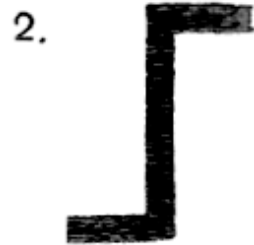
If the Semitic alphabet was inspired by the Egyptian, the theory of a similar inspiration for the Brāhmī script comes at once into the domain of practical scientific enquiry; for, as already observed, there is in respect of certain letters, a remarkable resemblance between Brāhmī and Semitic. Could both have sprung from the same source, the Egyptian? An affirmative answer cannot at once be given; but a point supporting such an answer may be noticed. At the beginning of the present paper, reference was made to an assertion in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (V, 32) that Prajāpati desirous of being born as 'many' began a course of meditation resulting in the creation of three letters, *a*, *u* and *ma*, which combined produced the praṇava. We have, in this assertion, evidence of an early Indo-Aryan tradition that the letters *a*, *u* and *ma* were the first to be evolved. Naturally, the three letters would constitute a group by itself, standing apart from other and later letters. Now, this is exactly a feature of the Egyptian alphabet. As Mr. Van Manen, of the Imperial Library, points out, out of the twenty four signs in the Egyptian alphabet three and only three are pictures of birds and correspond to the three letters *a*, *u* and *m*. It is allowable to infer from this circumstance that these three letters formed a distinct group in the Egyptian alphabetical scheme. Certain scholars consider the germ of that scheme to have been conceived outside Egypt, somewhere in north-east or Central Asia. It does not seem impossible, therefore, that the so-called Egyptian alphabets were related in some measure to the alphabets of the Indo-Aryans who were at a very early period, settled in Central Asia.

This finding leads us to consider another point in regard to the Egyptian alphabetical group *a*, *u* and *m*. With the introduction of homophones in the Middle and New Kingdoms we come across a new alternative form of *u*, namely . What could this spiral represent? The spiral-ornament has been traced by Professor Goodyear to the lotus flower which occurs as a motif in Egyptian architecture as early as about the 14th century B.C. That explanation applies also, I think to the spiral-letter *u*. The spiral occurs on Trojan spindle-whorls along with its duplicated forms  and  [see plate II] That these forms constitute the basis of the 'ogee' svastika

was noticed by Thomas Wilson, and I should regard them as proto-Brāhmī *ō*'s. The 'ogee' svastika was probably the earliest form of the svastika: a simplification of the spiral endings gave the forms employed in the Jaugada version of Aśoka's inscriptions. The mediaeval Indian symbol, which replaces the svastika of the earlier records and is itself replaced later by the syllabic omkāra, should be explained in the same way. The symbol is often identical in shape with the Egyptian *u*-spiral which, to one initiated in sacred symbolism, could well recall the whole group *a*, *u* and *m*:

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PLATE II.



THE SVASTIKA AND THE OMKĀRA.

KEY TO PLATE II.

1. Brāhmī o, one variety.
2. Brāhmī o, another variety.
3. Svastika, 'left-handed.'
4. Svastika, 'right-handed.'
5. Variant of 3.
6. Variant of 4.
7. Symbol for omkāra, usually found in mediaeval Indian records.
8. Variant of 7, given by Alberuni.

KEY TO PLATE III.

1. Indian Coin, Eran ; reproduced from crayon copy (by Kumar S. C. Sinhasarma) of Fig. 20, Pl. XI, in Cunningham's *Coins of Ancient India*.
2. Indian Coin, Ujain ; reproduced from cayon copy (by Kumar S. C. Sinhasarma) of Fig. 7, Pl. X, in Cunningham's *Coins of Ancient India*.
3. Biconical Spindle-whorl of 'Troy.'
(Wilson, *The Swastika*, Fig. 59).
4. Spindle-whorl of 'Troy' with 'ogee' svastikas.
(Wilson, *The Swastika*, Fig 63).

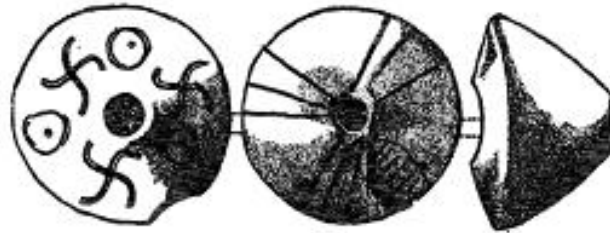
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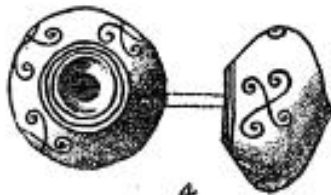
1.



2.



3.



4.

THE SVASTIKA AND THE OMKĀRA.



THE SVASTIKA AND THE OMKĀRA

KEY TO PLATE IV.

1. Greek 'Geometric' Vase (Smyrna).
(Wilson, *The Svastika*, Fig. 140).
2. Cinerary Urn (Cervetri-Italy).
(Wilson *The Svastika*, Fig. 186).
3. Greek Vase, oinochoe.
(Wilson, *The Svastika*, Fig. 155).
4. Detail of Greek 'Geometric' Vase (Thera).
(Wilson, *The Svastika*, Fig. 153).
5. Detail of Rhodian Vase.
(Wilson, *The Svastika*, Fig. 171).
6. Detail of Greek Vase (Naukratis).
(Wilson, *The Svastika*, Fig. 130a).

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