Om Yoga Meditation
Its Theory and Practice
This book is dedicated to
Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh

God Upon the Earth and Beloved Friend
# Contents

Preface ................................................................................................................................................. ix
Chapter One: Yoga ................................................................................................................................. 1
Chapter Two: The Word That Is God....................................................................................................... 22
Chapter Three: Om Yoga in Scriptures and Sages ................................................................................. 30
Chapter Four: Om Yoga Meditation ....................................................................................................... 41
Chapter Five: The Subtle Anatomy of the Yogi & Effects of Om Yoga .............................................. 54
Chapter Six: Understanding the Aspects of Om Yoga Meditation ....................................................... 73
Chapter Seven: Points for Successful Meditation ................................................................................. 108
Chapter Eight: The Foundations of Yoga ............................................................................................... 137
Afterword: It Is All Up To You ................................................................................................................ 166
Appendix One: The Glories and Powers of Om .................................................................................... 169
Appendix Two: Breath and Sound in Meditation ................................................................................... 218
Appendix Three: Practical Applications of OM ....................................................................................... 239
Glossary .................................................................................................................................................. 246
About the Author .................................................................................................................................. 292
Light of the Spirit Monastery ................................................................................................................ 293
Reading for Awakening ........................................................................................................................ 295
Most of the world is familiar with the mathematical formula: $E=mc^2$. But this is not just mathematics and physics, it is a statement about the nature of the universe and everything in it including us. If we take a block of ice and let it sit at room temperature, in time we will not have ice, but water. Water is the actual substance of the block and ice was just its momentary form. The reason that matter can be turned into energy as this little formula postulates, is the fact that all things already are energy, matter just being their temporary form. Furthermore, Quantum Physics has realized that energy is essentially consciousness. If this is thought about sufficiently it will revolutionize the way we see the world around us and ourselves.

Everything is vibrating energy and therefore everything emits very subtle sound patterns. The yoga adepts of India perceived these sound patterns and translated them into verbal forms that could reproduce them. These are known as mantras. Mantra is a Sanskrit term that means “a transforming thought” because when it is repeated a mantra transforms the ordinary consciousness of the repeater into higher consciousness. The repetition of a mantra to produce this transformation of consciousness is called japa. Mantras are never spoken like ordinary speech but are intoned or “sung” on a single note.
There are many mantras of varying character and potency. The mantra which embodies the Supreme Consciousness that is God is a single syllable: Om. It is called the Pranava, which means both the Word of Life and the Breath Word, since prana means both life and breath. In the Bhagavad Gita (7:8), the most widely-read scripture of India, we find these words: “I am Om, the Word that is God.” The yogis of India in Bengal usually use a symbolic form like this for the Divine Word, Om:

![Om Symbol]

This ideogram for Om symbolizes the four states of consciousness. The larger, lower part represents the waking state. The part just above that represents the dreaming state. The crescent above that represents the state of dreamless sleep. The dot represents the state of pure consciousness which pervades the other three. The single dot also represents perfect unity. Om is the embodiment of all four states.

Om meditation is simple, but remember that E=mc² is also very simple. An atomic explosion results from the movement of a single atomic particle. So it is with Om. The more you use it the more you will experience and benefit.

The statement that Om embodies the Divine Consciousness may seem an exaggeration, but to the yogi everything in the universe is a manifestation of that Consciousness. Some objects veil it, some reveal or lead toward it, and Om simply is it. Yoga is not a religion in the formal
sense, so it has no dogmas. Rather, it presents various practices and says: “See for yourself that this is real: it works.”

The most important thing to understand about yoga is that experience is the key element. Yoga is its own proof of validity, and the spiritual progress made by the yogi through its practice is the yogi’s validation. So if you carefully follow the instructions given in this book you will come to know, not just believe, that Om bestows the highest consciousness on those who invoke it continually, for that is the way in which the power and purpose of the Om mantra can be realized.

The yoga of the Self

Authentic yoga brings about everything spontaneously from deep within, from the Self. The yoga tradition says that the contemplation of the Pranava, Om, is the contemplation of our own true nature. It is the knowledge of our own Self. In yoga everything happens naturally and spontaneously at just the right time, simply through the Om breath. When the breath and Om are perfectly merged it is the major force of inner transformation-transmutation. The Om breath is the inner secret of the yogi.

Om was first perceived by the ancient yogis of prehistory and is not the exclusive property of any religion or philosophy. It is not a sectarian mantra; it belongs to all without distinction or exclusion. Nor was it invented by those primal sages. Rather, it is swayambhu: self-begotten, self-existent and self-sufficient. It arises spontaneously within, from the Self. It does not have to be artificially implanted or empowered in us by any kind of initiation. This mantra is going on in every one of us, but as long as we are outward-turned we do not become aware of it. During meditation, when we enter into our own depths, we become aware of Om, which has always been active within us.

“What world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That? If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, he is led to the world of Brahman
Who is higher than the highest life, That which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1, 5, 7).

Regarding the Pranava, Om, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (1:28) simply says: “Its repetition and meditation is the way.” The major Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as the Yoga Sutras, advocate meditation on Om, the sacred Syllable that both symbolizes and embodies Brahman, the Absolute Reality.

It is my hope that you will test for yourself the spiritual alchemy of Om Yoga that is set forth here. “This is the bridge to immortality….May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore beyond darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5, 6).

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(Please see the Glossary for the definition of unfamiliar words and also for brief biographical information on unfamiliar persons.)
Chapter One: Yoga

Yoga and freedom

Yoga is all about freedom. Only a fraction of the world’s population is formally imprisoned, but none are free from the inevitability of sickness, age, and death. The human condition is subject to innumerable limitations. Who really controls his life fully, attains all his goals, and knows no setbacks of any kind? No one.

Our real Self, the spirit, is ever perfect and free. But we have forgotten that. So we identify with our present experience of limitation and bondage and consequently suffer stress and pain in countless ways. Our situation is like someone who is asleep and dreaming that he is suffering or fearful. To end the fear and pain he needs only to wake up. Yoga is the procedure of self-awakening, the way to freedom from suffering, fear, and limitation. It is the quest for liberation of the spirit. Yoga is an eternal science intended to reveal and manifest the Eternal.

Nature of Yoga

Yoga is a Sanskrit word that means “to join.” Yoga is both union and the way to union. What do we join through yoga? First, we join our awareness to our own essential being: the spirit whose nature is pure consciousness. In yoga philosophy this is known as the Atman or spirit-Self.
Next, we join our finite consciousness to the Infinite Consciousness: God, the Supreme Self (Paramatman). In essence they are eternally one.

The individual Atman-spirit originally dwelt in the consciousness of that oneness. But through its descent into the material world the spirit lost its awareness of the eternal union and the capacity to live in and manifest the union on a practical level. Through yoga the lost consciousness can be regained and actualized in the individual’s practical life sphere.

Regarding this, a yogi-adept of the twentieth century, Dr. I. K. Taimni, remarks in his book *The Science of Yoga*: “According to the yogic philosophy it is possible to rise completely above the illusions and miseries of life and to gain infinite knowledge, bliss, and power through enlightenment *here and now* while we are still living in the physical body….No vague promise of an uncertain postmortem happiness this, but a definite scientific assertion of a fact verified by the experience of innumerable yogis, saints, and sages who have trodden the path of yoga throughout the ages.”

Since rational thought precedes rational action, we should begin with the philosophical side of Yoga.

**Yoga philosophy**

The basic text of the Yoga philosophy is the Yoga Sutras (also called Yoga Darshana), written by the sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India. In contrast to other philosophical systems, Yoga is a philosophy which stimulates its investigators to engage in yoga as a practice through which they will experience and demonstrate its truth and worth. What begins as theory develops into practice which culminates in realization. Yoga is philosophy, discipline, and experience—a revelation of consciousness.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna the teacher tells Arjuna the student: “There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be” (Bhagavad Gita 2:12). We are eternal beings, without beginning and without end.
Originally we were points of conscious light in the infinite ocean of Conscious Light that is God. We were gods within God. And so we still are, for it is not possible to be outside of Infinity. Yet we are also here in this ever-changing world, the experience of which completely overwhelms, and can annihilate, the awareness of our immortal life within God. As Blavatsky wrote in *The Voice of the Silence*: “Heaven's dew-drop glittering in the morn's first sunbeam within the bosom of the lotus, when dropped on earth becomes a piece of clay; behold, the pearl is now a speck of mire.” Each one of us is a dew-drop of heaven, but for countless life-cycles we have forgotten that.

**God the Lord–Ishwara**

In the Yoga Sutras the word for God is Ishwara: the Lord, Ruler, Master, or Controller possessing the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. Ishwara is the Supreme Power, Parameshwara. It is toward this Ishwara that our life is to be directed if we would attain perfection in yoga. In Yoga Sutra 1:23, Patanjali says that samadhi, the state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced, is produced by Ishwarapranidhana—the offering of one’s life to God. This is not merely dedicating our deeds and thoughts to God, but consciously merging our life in the greater Life of God and making them one. Yoga is the way to accomplish this.

Since yoga is a practical matter, we need some workable, pragmatic understanding of the nature of God. For how will we seek and recognize him if we have no idea who he is? Patanjali supplies us with exactly the kind of definition we need: “Ishwara is a particular Spirit who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions [karma] and the results and impressions [conditionings] produced by these actions” (Yoga Sutras 1:24).

*A particular Spirit.* God is a special, unique, conscious being—not just abstract Existence. God is a particular Spirit in the sense that God can be picked out or singled out from among all other things or beings.
Untouched. Though Ishwara is within all things and all things are within him, yet he stands apart. This is stated several times in the Bhagavad Gita: “They are contained in me, but I am not in them… I stand apart from them all, supreme and deathless” (7:12, 13). “For my spirit stands apart, watching over Maya, the maker” (9:9). “Standing apart, he sustains” (13:14). “He is within and without: he lives in the live and the lifeless: subtle beyond mind’s grasp; so near us, so utterly distant” (13:15). “Although I am not within any creature, all creatures exist within me” (9:4).

God is unique in the sense that he is Ekam Evam Advityam Brahman: the God who is one, only, without a second. He is not one of many, nor is he even one of two. He is one in every sense of the term. God is neither conditioned nor confined in any manner. Therefore he is not touched or tainted by the afflictions or faults of life (relative existence), in contrast to us who live within them as though they were the air we breathe and the basis of our existence. Nor is Ishwara bound or in any way conditioned by actions; therefore he is ever unchanging.

It should be noted that Ishwara is considered to be male in contrast to the divine creative power, Prakriti or Shakti, that is female. Consequently Ishwara is referred to as “he.” Brahman the Absolute is referred to as “It” because Brahman transcends such dualities as male and female, positive and negative. Since the English word God almost always implies Ishwara, in this book God will be referred to as “he.”

Infinite Consciousness: Omniscience

God is the essence and the apex of consciousness, so Patanjali further says: “In him is the highest limit of omniscience” (Yoga Sutras 1:25). Commenting on this, Shankara says: “The all-pervading mind of the supreme Lord is in simultaneous contact with every object.” The omniscience of God is total and absolute, for in truth God is Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence.

In this sutra Patanjali introduces a significant fact, for he does not just say that omniscience (sarvajña) is in God, but that the seed of
omniscience (sarvajña bijam) is in him. Within God is the seed or potentiality of omniscience for those who unite with him through their practice of yoga. Omniscience is not just objective knowledge, but infinity of consciousness, the Being of God himself.

The two Selves

“Who am I?” is the age-old question asked along with “Who is God?” The true “I” of each sentient being is the individual spirit, the Self (Atman). But there is more. God (Brahman) is the Self of the Self as the ocean is the self of every wave. The illumined know that they are the immortal Self whose ultimate Self is the Immortal Itself. We are spirits within Spirit, in a wondrous way both ourselves and Brahman, both finite and infinite.

“Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual Self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the selfsame tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes. The individual Self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1, 2).

“That being who is the power of all powers, and is born as such, who embodies himself in the elements and in them exists, and who has entered the lotus of the heart, is the immortal Self” (Katha Upanishad 2:1:7).

“In the effulgent lotus of the heart dwells Brahman, who is passionless and indivisible. He is pure, he is the light of lights. Him the knowers of the Self attain” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.9).

“Brahman is supreme; he is self-luminous, he is beyond all thought. Subtler than the subtlest is he, farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest. He resides in the lotus of the heart of every being” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.7).
“He who glows in the depths of your eyes—that is Brahman; that is the Self of yourself. He is the Beautiful One, he is the Luminous One. In all the worlds, forever and ever, he shines!” (Chandogya Upanishad 4:15:1).

Meditation is the key to knowledge of both the Self and the Self of the Self. Knowing one, both are known, so say the sages. “Wise, self-controlled, and tranquil souls, who are contented in spirit, and who practice austerity and meditation in solitude and silence, are freed from all impurity, and attain by the path of liberation to the Immortal, the truly existing, the changeless Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11).

Dr. I. K. Taimni, in *The Ultimate Reality and Realization*, says this: “It is only when the realization of being a pure spirit or atma has been attained that it is possible to achieve the final goal of union of the atma with the Paramatma, the Supreme Spirit which exists eternally beyond the manifested universe and from which the manifested universe is derived. When this final realization has been attained and union of atma with Paramatma has been brought about there is not only a complete sharing of consciousness between the two but also of the infinite Power which is inherent in the Universal Consciousness….It is necessary to distinguish between the powers which are acquired on the realization that he is a pure spirit or atma and those which are attained when he is able to destroy the last vestige of egoism and his consciousness becomes united with that of Paramatma. The former, though tremendous in some respects, are still limited, while the latter which are really the Powers of the Supreme Spirit are infinite and can manifest through the center of consciousness of a Self-realized individual because there is fusion of the individual consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness and the channel between the two is open.”

**God and gods**

We are gods within God, finite spirits within the infinite Spirit. But what is spirit? Yoga tells us that spirit is *consciousness*. We are eternal
consciousnesses, each of us individual and distinct. Yet we are more. Each of us takes our being from God as the wave takes its existence from the ocean.

God is the eternal Root, the Ground, of our being, our greater Self. We are not God, but in some ineffable manner God is us, the Self of our Self, the Spirit of our spirit. God is all, and we are the parts, each of us possessing an eternal and irrevocable distinction. That is why Krishna told Arjuna: “There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be.”

“Both the individual Self and the Universal Self have entered the cave of the heart, the abode of the Most High, but the knowers of Brahman see a difference between them as between sunshine and shadow” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:1).

God and creation

God, the infinite Spirit, is pure consciousness, but has extended or emanated himself as the cosmos: physical, astral, and causal. “This universe, before it was created, existed as Brahman. ‘I am Brahman;’ thus did Brahman know himself. Knowing himself, he became the Self of all beings” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1:4:10). This seemingly dual nature of God as Light and Power, as Consciousness and Matter, has puzzled the minds of even the wise.

God, the Original Being, projects himself as the ever-changing dance of creation, as the evolving light that is the cosmos. God projects the creation, evolves it, and withdraws it back into himself in a perpetual cycle. The creation can be thought of as God’s body, that God becomes incarnate in creation again and again. And as parts or reflections of God we do exactly the same through reincarnation.

There is a law that governs the place and kind of our embodiment. That law is karma, the principle of exact and usually inevitable reaction to our own actions and mental states, resulting in a seemingly endless domino effect of continual birth and death. Yoga offers us the possibility
of ending this chain of embodiments by awakening-transformation from time and mortality into eternity and immortality.

And us…

All conscious beings have existed eternally within the Being of God, one with him, distinct though not separate from him. Rooted in the infinity of God, they have within themselves an innate impulse to transcend their finitude and attain the boundlessness of their origin. This is impossible, since they are as immutable as God—the only infinite being. They can become godlike, but they cannot become God. Yet the urge for transcendence is part of their nature.

The solution to this dilemma is simple. The individual consciousnesses cannot alter their natural state of finitude, but they can come to share and participate in the infinite consciousness of God. Even though they cannot become infinite themselves, they can experience the infinity of their divine Source, just as a psychically sensitive person can experience the thoughts and feelings of others without becoming them. In the same way, spirits can evolve to experience the consciousness of God while remaining in their naturally limited state. They do not become God the Absolute, but they enter into that Absolute Life and are one with it.

As Shankara explains in his Yoga Sutra commentary: “When the light of several lamps appears simultaneously, it cannot be made out which is the light of which.” Consequently liberated spirits experience the infinite being of God, infinite Consciousness, as their own being. Krishna has described it this way: “When you have reached enlightenment, ignorance will delude you no longer. In the light of that knowledge you will see the entire creation within your own Atman and in me” (Bhagavad Gita 4:35).

When the spirits are unshakably established in that consciousness the goal has been attained. All they need do is develop the capacity for such a state of awareness. This is done by learning to fully experience the state of existence of a being completely different from themselves
while retaining the awareness of their true identity. They can put on the costume of a consciousness utterly different from theirs, and not just experience that other mode of consciousness, but become able to function as that other kind of being.

**Evolutionary creation**

To enable the spirits to enter into this process, God breathes forth his own Self as the Power from which is manifested all the realms of relative existence, from the most subtle worlds of perfected beings to the most objective worlds of atomic matter. They can then enter into relative existence by taking on coverings, or bodies, of varying grades and patterns of vibratory energies. They descend into this material world and begin working their way up the ladder of ever-evolving forms. Beginning with forms whose scope of consciousness is vastly less than theirs, they work their way upward, entering into higher and higher levels of awareness until they can surpass their original breadth of consciousness and begin to partake of a life of awareness much beyond their own. This then culminates in their developing the ability to share in the Divine Consciousness itself.

There are seven worlds (lokas) or main divisions of relative existence. These worlds are the rungs of the evolutionary ladder. They correspond to the seven levels of consciousness that determine which of the worlds the individual spirit incarnates in. Keeping in mind that “world” in this list does not mean a planet, but a great division that includes within it many levels of existence, many planes of consciousness, here is a list of the seven worlds:

1. Bhur Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of matter.
2. Bhuva Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of feeling: emotion, instinct, and lower intuition.
3. Swar Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of sensory experience.
4. Maha Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of thought and reflective perception.

5. Jnana Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of fundamental causation and spiritual intuition.

6. Tapa Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of mastery of all the lesser elements and levels.

7. Satya Loka, where the dominant consciousness is that of spirit-consciousness itself.

Bhur Loka is purely material; Bhuva and Swar Lokas are formed of astral energies; Maha Loka is a mixture of astral and causal energies; Jnana and Tapa Lokas are completely causal energies; and Satya Loka is a mixture of extremely subtle causal energies and pure consciousness.

Incarnating spirits move upward and downward in the three lower worlds of Bhur, Bhuva, and Swar, but once they attain the level of Maha Loka they are never reborn in the three lower worlds unless they will to do so. Spirits may move between the two worlds of Maha and Jnana, but once they reach Tapa Loka they remain there until they evolve into Satya Loka which is the world of perfectly liberated spirits and spirits that have evolved beyond Tapa Loka and are so close to liberation that they can arise to such a rarefied spiritual atmosphere as Satya Loka. Those fully liberated spirits who return to lower worlds for the benefit of others do so as avatars, incarnations of God-consciousness.

In the intervals between embodiments the spirit spends time in the astral regions where awakening and growth also take place. (This is best explained in the forty-third chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda.) Upward and upward they evolve until their capacity for awareness is developed to such a perfect state that they can experience and participate in God's all-embracing Consciousness, thenceforth to live in his infinity.
As Shakespeare wrote, “all the world’s a stage” with the individual spirits wearing their body-costumes and playing their karmic parts. Just as actors begin with small parts and progress to bigger roles by demonstrating their skill in those smaller parts, so also do the spirits advance to higher and more complex forms of existence and consciousness, at last returning home to God. The Sufi poet, Rumi, wrote:

A stone I died and rose again a plant.
A plant I died and rose an animal;
I died an animal and was born a man.
Why should I fear? What have I lost by death?
As man, death sweeps me from this world of men
That I may wear an angel’s wings in heaven;
Yet e’en as angel may I not abide,
For nought abideth save the face of God.
Thus o’er the angels’ world I wing my way
Onwards and upwards, unto boundless lights;
Then let me be as nought, for in my heart
Rings as a harp-song that we must return to him.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of many great Americans whose belief in reincarnation is overlooked, wrote in his poem, The Chambered Nautilus:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!

That is the purpose of creation and our place in it.
The religion of Yoga

It is commonly said that Yoga is not a religion. But since religion is derived from the Latin word *religere*, which means “to bind back,” and yoga means “joining,” practically speaking yoga is the *only* religion. The many systems of dogmas and doctrines are by their very nature not really religions at all, and in most instances are systems of superstition—either by the nature of their ideas or practices or by the attitudes of their adherents toward their beliefs and disciplines. Only when Yoga and Self-realization are the matrix around which a philosophy has been formulated for their furtherance is it worthy of our consideration. Other philosophies only produce confusion and distraction from the divine goal.

Regarding this, in his commentary on the twenty-second sutra of the Kaivalya Pada of the Yoga Sutras, Taimni says: “The student will have noticed that in the ideas set forth in the above pages no effort has been made to link up the facts of Yogic philosophy with doctrines which are considered to be religious. But this does not mean that there is no relation between them. In fact, a religious man can see, if he studies the subject of Yoga with an open mind, that all the ideas of Yogic philosophy can be interpreted in religious terms, and the consciousness which the Yogi seeks to uncover within the folds of his mind is nothing but that Supreme Reality which is commonly referred to as God. God is recognized by every religion with any philosophical background to be a Mighty Being whose consciousness transcends the manifested Universe. He is considered to be hidden within every human heart. He is supposed to transcend the mind. Basically, these ideas are the same as those of Yogic philosophy. The main difference lies in the assertion by Yogic philosophy that this Supreme Reality or Consciousness is not merely a matter for speculation or even adoration but can be discovered by following a technique which is as definite and unfailing as the technique of any modern Science. Yoga thus imparts a tremendous significance to religion and places the whole problem of religious life and endeavor on an entirely new basis and it is difficult to
understand how any religious man can reject its claims without giving them due consideration.”

It is yoga alone which reunites the consciousness of the individual to its infinite source, restoring the lost unity. Earlier I quoted a paragraph from I. K. Taimni’s book *The Science of Yoga* about the purpose of yoga, but omitting his preceding words regarding the relation of yoga to religion—or rather, their difference. Here they are now, for I think you will find them relevant:

“The Orthodox religious ideal which requires people to be good and moral so that they may have a happy life here and hereafter is really a concession to human weakness and the desire to prefer the so-called happiness in life to enlightenment.

“In this respect the philosophy of yoga differs fundamentally from most of the orthodox religions of the world which offer nothing better than an uncertain and nebulous happiness in the life after death. They say in effect ‘Lead a good life to ensure happiness after death, put your faith in God and hope for the best.’ According to yogic philosophy death no more solves your spiritual problem than night solves your economic problem. If you are poor you do not expect on going to bed that your economic problem will be automatically solved next day. You will have to get up the next day and begin where you left off the previous night. If you are poor economically you do not expect to get rich overnight and if you are poor spiritually, bound by illusions and limitations of all kinds, you cannot expect to become enlightened [by simply being reborn] or, if you do not believe in reincarnation, in the vague and unending life which is supposed to follow death.”

Yoga is the way we answer for ourselves the prayer:

   Lead me from the unreal to the Real.
   Lead me from darkness to the Light.
   Lead me from death to Immortality.
The Conscious Universe

The ancient yogi-sages of India directly experienced the truth that the entire universe is a manifestation of Divine Consciousness—of God. All creation is really spirit, not matter at all. More to the point, it is the infinitely complex and perfect thought of God. Just as we create worlds and live in them when we dream or daydream, in the same way the cosmic dreamer is dreaming the cosmic dream of this evolutionary creation, and we are dreaming our personal dream within it. Therefore it all has a meaning and a purpose, and is at all times absolutely perfect and consistent with itself. We must keep this in mind at all times, but especially when considering our life-dream within the greater dream.

As yogis aspiring to return to infinite being through the self-evolution produced by our yoga practice, we should understand every step of the way, and this requires a comprehension of the specific laws governing our presence within creation and our way out of relativity back into the Absolute.

The beginning—and the end

When the individual spirit-Self, the Atman, moves in its consciousness from the Absolute to the relative, the first step is an outward-turning of awareness and a production of the seed of dual consciousness that is necessary for its entry into and its eventual exit out of the relative state that is fundamentally dual. This is done through the slightest and subtlest of movements that produces a kind of stress-point in our awareness. This is the moment of entry into relativity, though so subtle as to be virtually imperceptible. Actually, the movement is the stress-point. (On the cosmic level it is the root or seed that is the beginning of all things, the Holy Breath, the Agia Pneuma, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Light, from which all things proceed and into which all things are ultimately resolved.) As a divine seed it contains all that ever shall be for that individual spirit. Its unfoldment and manifestation is the history or destiny that it shall experience throughout its time within relative existence.
This initial impulse is dual in nature. First, it is the force that impels the individual onto the path that leads into involution—into experience and identity with increasingly complex forms of manifestation; and it is also the impulse that moves the spirit onto the path of evolution—of growth out of relativity. Second, it is the beginning of duality: a vast chain of constant cycling between two poles—negative and positive—that makes relative existence possible, both as evolving consciousness and evolving organism.

First the spirit travels along the path of involution until it reaches the experience of self-awareness and self-reflection (or analysis) within a human body sufficiently developed to permit—and even perhaps produce—that awareness. Then it begins the path of evolution back to infinity. Of course, the two paths are really one—it is only a matter of the direction being taken. The point where involution becomes evolution is a kind of watershed or continental divide. All this is a direct production of the original breath which takes place both macrocosmically and microcosmically. This has a profound yogic significance, and will be discussed in a later chapter.

In yogic treatises we find it stated over and over that the breath is the essence of our existence. Prana means both life and breath in Hinduism and Buddhism. In fact, the word Atman (Self) comes from the root-word at, which means “to breathe.” Other religions also use the same word for both spirit and breath: in Judaism, ruach; in ancient Greek religion and Eastern Christianity, pneuma; in ancient Roman religion and Western Christianity, spiritus which comes from spiro, “I breathe.”

Discovering Yoga

The ancient yogis of India found after intense and extensive self-examination that the mind, the instrument of the spirit-consciousness, was fundamentally affected by two factors, breath and sound, and that all other elements were quite secondary to these two things. Investigating the breath in its subtler and subtler (higher and higher) levels, they found
that breath and sound were inseparable—really two manifestations of a single factor: an impulse that came directly from the spirit. In the highest level they found that the breath is originally a kind of unitary-yet-dual impulse manifesting in a circular motion or pattern that is single yet possessing two halves which appear in the body as two parallel movements—inhalation and exhalation—seemingly opposed to one another and completely separate like two lines side-by-side.

They further discovered that root impulse of inhalation and exhalation makes the subtle sound of Om. But we have lost the awareness of that sacred thread of inmost consciousness and are now wandering without direction or discernment. By means of Om Yoga we consciously take hold of the thread and begin moving in the right direction.

Through constant repetition of Om in time with their breath, those primeval yogis united their outer and inner consciousness and will. In this way they brought their physical, astral and causal bodies back into alignment with the evolutionary vibrations of Om—for Om is the keynote of the evolving universe. Repeating it in a constant flow turns the mind inward and produces spiritual awareness in an ever-increasing degree, in time putting us in touch with the cosmos as well as our Self and God.

And that is what this book is all about, for this tradition has been handed down even until today, though often obscured and nearly lost.

The religion of yoga is the way to restore the original evolutionary pattern on the individual level, enabling the yogis go from darkness to the Light of God which fills the horizon of their consciousness completely in the realization-experience that is the ever-increasing awareness of God as the prime reality and our individual spirit as a divine atom of that Divine Light, drawing on the infinite life for its finite life. Since God is our own inmost reality, through Om japa and meditation we will become increasingly ourselves until we become gods within God. That is the glory of yoga: we breathe God. The experience of separation from God is an illusion, but the experience of union with God is reality. Om is the force that impels us ever onward and upward.
Yoga

Mantra

Yoga is based on the science of spiritual sound, or mantra. A mantra is a series of sounds whose effect lies not in an assigned intellectual meaning, but in an inherent sound-power that can produce a specific effect, physically or psychologically. The word mantra itself comes from the Sanskrit expression *manat trayate* which means “a transforming thought” which produces an objective, perceptible change. Om is the supreme mantra of liberation.

The way to receive the benefit of a mantra is japa, the continual repetition-intonation of the mantra. In this way the invoker is constantly imbued with the power and consciousness inherent in the mantra. So whenever we intone Om, we align and link our consciousness with its origin: both our spirit and Divine Spirit.

The Vachaka—sound form—of Ishwara

In the section of the Yoga Sutras (1:27) dealing with Ishwara, the Supreme Lord, Patanjali makes this statement: *Tasya vachakah pranavah*—“His vachaka is the Pranava.” “Vachaka” means speech or speaking. “Pranava” means Life, Life-Giver and Breath Principle. The vachaka of Ishwara is Om, the Breath and Life Word. Ishwara vibrates Om as the foundation of the universe, as the evolutionary life force within the cosmos and every individual being.

Om is the Word written about by Saint John in his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4). This is all about Om, and shows that Christianity is deeply rooted in the philosophy and yoga of India.

God is the guru of all

“The Lord lives in the heart of every creature” (Bhagavad Gita 18:61). Dwelling in the hearts of all, God empowers and guides the questing
souls. Gorakhnath, the greatest of all yogis, asked his teacher, Matsyendranath: “Who is the Primal Guru [Adiguru]?” And Matsyendranath answered: “The Eternal Beginningless One [Anadi] is the Primal Guru” (Gorak Bodha 21, 22). He continued: “Realization of that Guru gives us immortality” (Gorak Bodha 24).

Since God is eternal, it is from him that all knowledge has come—especially the revelation of spiritual truth. As Vyasa observes: “His purpose is to give grace to living beings, by teaching knowledge and dharma [righteousness].” “There is no other but God to give the teaching which is a boat by which they can cross over the sea of samsara, and he teaches knowledge and dharma to those who take sole refuge in him….For all the kinds of knowledge arise from him, as sparks of fire from a blaze or drops of water from the sea,” says Shankara. This does not mean that qualified spiritual teachers are not helpful to us, but dwelling in the hearts of all, God continues to be the guru of questing souls. Others are only teachers (acharyas).

Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashaya wrote to a student regarding the guru: “No one does anything; all is done by God. The individual [that seems to be the guru] is only an excuse; remain abidingly focused on that Divine Guru; in this is blessing.”

Swami Yatiswarananda, Vice-president of the Ramakrishna Mission, wrote to one of his students: “We bring the message of the guru of gurus….please turn to him for light and guidance, for peace and blessedness….The Lord, the guru of gurus, alone can give us the shelter, the illumination and the bliss we need.”

Sri Ramakrishna himself said: “Satchidananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] alone is the guru; he alone will teach” (1.2.8; also: 4.2.1, 5.1.2, 5.5.1). “There is no other guru except Satchidananda. There is no other refuge but him. He alone is the ferryman who takes one across the ocean of relative existence” (1.12.8). “The more you will advance, the more you will see that it is he who has become everything and it is he who is doing everything. He alone is the guru and he alone is the spiritual
ideal of your choice. He alone is giving jnana, bhakti and everything” (4.26.2). “Do you pray to Satchidananda Guru every morning? Do you?” (4.9.2). (These quotations are from the Majumdar translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.)

God is the guru of humanity because he has implanted in us the Om mantra. In the depths of our being, God is perpetually stimulating–teaching–the spirit to emanate Om as the agent of its evolution and perfection. In this way God is the guru of each one of us. The aspiring yogi can then feel safe and assured, for God will be his guru, just as he has been for all the enlightened throughout the ages. “He is guru even of the ancients,” affirmed Patanjali (Yoga Sutras 1:26). In the sixth edition of Paramhansa Yogananda’s *Whispers From Eternity*, on page 263 there is this declaration-vow to God: “Thou art my Guru-Preceptor; I am Thy disciple.”

**You are also the guru**

All spiritual life is self-initiated from within; we are both guru and disciple as Krishna and Arjuna symbolize in the Bhagavad Gita. Ultimately the yogi must be guided by the divine from within his own consciousness. The God-illumined mind becomes our guru. “The mind is itself guru and disciple: it smiles on itself, and is the cause of its own well-being or ruin,” wrote the great poet-saint Tukaram (*Tukaram’s Teachings*, by S. R. Sharma, p. 19). “The mind will eventually turn into your guru,” said Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna (*The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 340). Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, in speaking about the role of an external guru said: “Know this! There is no greater guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, this inner guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached” (*The Eternal Companion*, p. 120).

Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashaya wrote to a student regarding the guru: “Guru is the one who is all; Guru is the one who is
merciful. You are the Guru within yourself” (*Garland of Letters [Patravali]*, Letter 45). In *Purana Purusha* by Dr. Ashoke Kumar Chatterjee it is recorded on page 224 that Yogiraj made these two statements: “I am not a guru. I do not hold the distinction of ‘guru’ and ‘disciple.’” “The Self is the Guru…the immortal, imperishable Guru.”

The great fourteenth-century yogini, Lalla Yogeshwari, sang about finding her inner guru, her Self:

> With passionate longing did I, Lalla, go forth. Seeking and searching did I pass the day and night. Then, lo, saw I in mine own house a learned man [pandit], And that was my lucky star and my lucky moment when I laid hold of him. (*Lalla Vakyani* 3)

**Another teacher**

According to Vyasa there is another teacher: our yoga practice itself. He says: “It is yoga that is the teacher. How so? It has been said: ‘Yoga is to be known by yoga. Yoga goes forward from yoga alone. He who is not careless [neglectful] in his yoga for a long time, rejoices in the yoga.’” Shankara, commenting on these words of Vyasa, discusses the reaction that the awakening person has upon learning about the possibility of liberation from his present state of bondage: “Meditation on his own being, which is the cause that should lead to liberation, begins of itself, caused by karma of a previous life or else by steadfastness in renunciation in this present one. And it goes on of itself, without instruction from a teacher.”

The experience gained from yoga practice itself teaches us the reality and value of yoga. But even more, it opens our intuition and enables us to comprehend the inner workings of the subtle levels of our being and its mastery. Yoga truly becomes our teacher, revealing to us that which is far beyond the wisdom of books and verbal instructions. Moreover, it is practice of yoga that enables us to understand the basis and rationale
of its methods and their application. The why and wherefore of yoga become known to us by direct insight.

In his commentary on Yoga Sutra 2:28 Vyasa says: “From practicing yoga, illusion [ignorance] is destroyed and perishes. When it is destroyed, there is manifestation of right vision. In proportion to the practice done, illusion is dispelled. In proportion to its destruction, the light of [spiritual] knowledge increases correspondingly. This increase is an experience of increasing refinement up to the realization of the true nature of the purusha [spirit].”

The Yoga Vashishtha says it clearly and truly: “God consciousness is not achieved by means of the scriptures, nor is it achieved by the grace of your master. God consciousness is only achieved by your own subtle awareness.”

When Gorakhnath asked: “Who is the Guru that leads to the Goal?” Matsyendranath told him: “Nirvana itself is the Guru that leads to the Goal.” That is, the liberated condition of the Self, though presently buried beneath the debris of lifetimes of ignorance, is itself the inspirer and guide to the revelation of our eternal liberation.
Chapter Two:

The Word That Is God

“I am Om, the Word that is God” (Bhagavad Gita 7:8).

The Pranava

Writing about Ishwara, the Lord, Patanjali says: “His spoken form is the Pranava [Om]” (Yoga Sutras 1:27), as we have already seen. Swami Vivekananda translates vachaka: “His manifesting word.”

When Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was asked if Om was the name of Ishwara, he replied: “Om is Ishwara, Ishwara is Om. That means Om Itself is the swarupam [the true form of Ishwara].” And at another time: “Om itself is Brahman.”

This sacred Word was the heart of the primeval esoteric wisdom of the sages of ancient India. An essential part of that wisdom is the knowledge of words of power or mantras which possess an inherent sound-power that can produce a sublime spiritual effect.

In the beginning…

In Chapter One it is said, “To enable the spirits to enter into this process, God breathes forth his own Self as the Power from which is manifested all the realms of relative existence, from the most subtle worlds of nearly-perfected beings to the most objective worlds of atomic matter.” Om is both the Consciousness and the Power that is God. It is his manifesting Word because it makes God manifest to us and is
The Word That Is God

itself the power by which God manifests his will, especially through his creation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

The first act of God is the projection of himself as the Cosmic Vibration: Om. He speaks himself and becomes all things. Then we enter Om itself to come into manifestation. The bodies which we take on are all formed of variations on the fundamental energy or keynote that is Om. We come into relative existence through Om, we evolve within relative existence through Om, and we transcend relative existence and return to God’s perfect Being through Om. It is no wonder, then, that Om is also called the Pranava, the Word of Life, the Living Word.

The Word that is God

“I am the Pranava,” declared the infinite Satchidananda through the lips of the avatar Krishna (Bhagavad Gita 7:8). And: “I am Om [Omkara]” (Bhagavad Gita 9:17). “Among words I am the single-syllable [Om]” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25).

How can a Word be God? How can God be a Word?

All things, the entire cosmos itself, are formed of vibrating energy. This cosmic energy possesses the dual nature of light and sound, both of which are essentially consciousness. The totality of that consciousness is contained and summed up in the Divine Word, Om, known as the Shabda Brahman, the Sound God. Om is spoken, yet it is beyond speech in its essence because it is the source of speech. Its spoken form is the final step in the objectification of the primal creative stream arising from the inmost depths of being itself, that “point of light within the mind of God” from which has issued all manifested being, all that IS. It is the original movement outward from the omnipresent center which took place when the Supreme Consciousness willed, “I
am one; let me become many” (Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:3; Taittiriya Upanishad 2:6).

The Upanishads also tell us that Om is Brahman:
“Om is Brahman, the primeval being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1).
“I will tell you briefly of that goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for which people practice discipline: It is Om” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17).
“The udgitha [Om] is the supreme Brahman” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:7).
“Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

The Word that is me!
They also tell us that Om is our own Self, as well:
“The Self [Atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om….Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12).
“Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

Om the mantra
Om is the original Mantra, possessing sound-power that can produce a profoundly beneficial effect on physical, mental and spiritual levels. The word mantra [manat trayate] means literally, “that which when thought carries across.” It is a liberating thought. In the Yoga tradition, Om is the supreme mantra, and the most sacred of holy words in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain rituals and meditation. Tibetan Buddhism particularly emphasizes the power and value of Om.

In Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, Amida Buddha is invoked by saying Omitofo [Amida Buddha]. One time when I was participating in a Name Recitation (Nienfo) session, during the dharma talk at the close the leader, the Venerable Manpu, explained that in the depths of meditation—and especially at the time of leaving the body—the practitioner passes from Omitofo to Omito [Amida] and thence to Om which is the
The Word That Is God

essence of Omitofo and is the force that carries the cultivator into the consciousness that is the Pure Land or Sukhavati. Pure Land Buddhists also bless water by drawing an Om symbol in it.

Om is called: Pranava, Omkara, and Ekakshara. Pranava means both life-giver (infuser of prana) and controller of life force (prana). Omkara means “the Om” or even “the Om thing” just as ahankara means “I-ness” or the principle of “I.” Ekakshara means one letter, one syllable or the one-syllable Word, because in Sanskrit the consonants are counted as letters or syllables and not the vowels, which is why the Torah has only consonants written out, the vowels being indicated by points. Since \( M \) is its only consonant, Om is considered to be ekakshara. Many mono-syllables in Sanskrit have only a single consonant, but Ekakshara always means Om specifically. It also means “the Only Imperishable,” indicating its identity with God, and always refers to Om. The first recorded teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi, written down by him in response to the request of a seeker, was: “The Ekakshara [Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.”

Throughout the ages Om has been the mantra specially commended to sannyasis (monastics), and the majority of them, especially those in the Swami Order of Shankara, have generally employed it as the heart of their sadhana (spiritual practice).

Om was the particular focus of the Nath Yogis, a most renowned and revered order of yogi-monks in India. The Nath Yogis claimed to be in direct line from the original yogis, the first of which was a divine manifestation known as Adinath, the Primal Lord. Appearing on earth in humanlike form, God himself taught Matsyendranath, the first liberated human being in this cycle of creation. He in turn taught Gorakhnath, the unparalleled teacher-adept in the yogic succession. Patanjali was also a Nath Yogi. The Nath Yogis claim Jesus—Sri Isha Natha—as a great adept of their order, as recorded in their sacred book, the Nathanamavali.

Nearer our own time, the great nineteenth-century Hindu reformer, Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati, renowned as a yogi \textit{par excellence},
practiced the japa and meditation of Om and taught them to others, whatever their mode of life.

What do we do?

What do we do with this sacred word, Om? Krishna tells us: “Established in yoga concentration, uttering Om, the single-syllable Brahman, meditating on Me,…he goes to the supreme goal” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12, 13). Shankara in his commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad says: “Just as the bow is the cause of the arrow’s hitting the target, so Om is the bow that brings about the soul’s entry into the Immutable. For the soul when purified by the repetition of Om gets fixed in Brahman with the help of Om without any hindrance, just as an arrow shot from a bow gets transfixed in the target.” And commenting on Patanjali’s statement that Ishwara’s “designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om],” Shankara says: “This sutra explains the form in which the devotee contemplates on him.”

An anonymous commentator on a writing of Shankara says this: “The sound Om is the Name and Symbol of Brahman. One realizes Brahman by meditation on this Om. When Om is uttered with concentration there arises the consciousness of Brahman in the mind. [For] Om is the matrix of all sounds. Brahman is the substratum of the whole universe and Om, too, is the substratum of all sounds. Sounds and phenomena are non-different, so the substratum alone remains. Hence Brahman is Om.” The translator adds this comment: “The Pranava that indicates Brahman is not only the boat, but is verily the other shore reached after crossing the ocean of worldly existence [samsara].”

The master yogis of India have through the ages said that God and Om are one, that the infinite consciousness of God is inherent in the syllable Om, just as the tree is inherent in the seed. Since the individual spirit and God are essentially one, we can conclude that Om, repeated within the mind in japa and meditation, will produce the consciousness of God and bring about the restoration of our union with God through the awakening of our spirit-Self that is also Om.
God is guru in the form of Om

Immediately after telling us that God “is Guru even of the Ancients,” Patanjali says: “His spoken form is the Pranava.” In a hymn of the poet-saint Kabir, an Indian mystic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there are two important statements: “That Word is the Guru; I have heard it, and become the disciple…. That Word reveals all.” Beautiful as the thought of God being the guru may be, is it true? If so, how is God the guru?

In the depths of God’s being, Om is eternally present, is eternally flowing or rising, and the same is true of each individual spirit. The heart-core of God and the core of the individual spirit are the same in non-dual unity. Om is flowing from the single point where the spirit and the Spirit are absolutely one.

God is eternally stimulating or teaching the spirit to emanate Om as the agent of its evolution and perfection. In this way God is the guru of each one of us. One finite spirit may reveal to another finite spirit the way to realize its oneness with God, and thereby momentarily become a spiritual teacher for that spirit; but God alone will be the Sat–true and eternal–Guru.

Om is the ultimate guru, the infallible teacher and guide from within.

Divine discipleship

The first American disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda was Dr. M. W. Lewis, who perfectly assimilated the wisdom imparted to him by Yogananda. In a talk given in San Diego, California, in 1955, he said these inspiring words:

“To me the real meaning and understanding of discipleship is that a disciple, a true disciple, is ‘one who follows God.’ Many times the Master said that. In spite of his realization and his oneness with God, which he had and does have now, he said when leaving Boston, ‘Never mind what happens to me. That Light which you see is far greater than I am. That is God himself.’ And so, there is only one Guru, and that
is God, and the greater the saint, if we can classify them that way, the surer they are to say, ‘I am nothing; God is all.’ And so, the Master said that. God alone is reality. He is with you. He is the One Great Guru. And the Master was most humble, because the more you realize there is One Reality, God himself, the more humble you become, because the ego cannot stay. If you have realization of God, the ego has left.

“And so, realize: who may become a disciple? Anyone; anyone who knows the Presence of God, and follows God. Master often said that someone said to him in India, ‘I hear so-and-so is your disciple in America.’ He said, ‘They say so.’ And seeing the confusion on the face of the inquirer, he said, ‘I haven’t any disciple. They’re all disciples of God.’ How wonderful that is. And so, just realize, he who knows God may be called a disciple. Now that means you must have contact with God. There must be a relationship between you and God, an understanding, a realization that God is in you, you are in God, there is one consciousness: God alone. Now if you have that, you may be called a disciple.” (Dr. Lewis was the disciple spoken of in India.)

**Initiation?**

It is commonly believed that an aspiring yogi must be empowered for yoga practice through some kind of initiation or transference of power. There are many exaggerated statements made about how it is impossible to make any progress, much less attain enlightenment, without initiation. But they have no relevance to the practice of Om Yoga, which requires no initiation because it is based squarely on the eternal nature and unity of the jivatman and the Paramatman, what to speak of the nature of Om itself. The japa and meditation of Om are themselves expressions of the eternal nature of God and man. The eternal spirits need no external input to return to their Source.

It is when the individual perpetually experiences the eternal point where Om is common to both itself and God that it can know its oneness with God, and separation from God is impossible for it. Yet it is
still itself, still distinct, though its consciousness is totally absorbed in God and it sees only the One, and can say, “God alone exists. There is no other but God.” All we need is God himself in the form of Om.
Chapter Three:

Om Yoga

in Scriptures and Sages

The Rig Veda

“He who knows not the eternal Syllable of the Veda [Om], the highest point upon which all the gods repose, what business has he with the Veda? Only its knowers sit here in peace and concord” (Rig Veda I.164.39).

The Yajur Veda

“At the time of departure from this world, remember Om, the Lord, the Protector” (Yajur Veda 40:15).

Aitareya Brahmana

“That which glows [i.e., the sun] is Om” (Aitareya-Brahmana 5.32).

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

“This breath [prana] is also Om” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.23).

“Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being. This is the Veda which the knowers of Brahman know; through it one knows what is to be known” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1).
Chandogya Upanishad

“One should meditate on this Syllable [Om]. That is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1, 3).

“Speech [vak] and breath [prana] are joined together in the Syllable Om. Verily, whenever the pair come together, they fulfil each other’s desire. He who knowing this thus, meditates on the Syllable, becomes, verily, a fulfiller of desires. Verily, this Syllable is of assent, for whenever one assents to anything he says simply ‘Om.’ What is assent is fulfillment. He, who knowing this thus, meditates on the Syllable, becomes, verily, a fulfiller of desires. Saying ‘Om,’ one recites: saying ‘Om,’ one orders: saying ‘Om,’ one sings aloud, in honor of that Syllable, with its greatness and its essence. He who knows this thus, and he who knows not, both perform with it. Knowledge and ignorance, however, are different. What, indeed, one performs with knowledge, faith, and meditation, that, indeed becomes more powerful. This, verily is the explanation of this Syllable” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6-10).

“He obtains wishes by singing [intoning], who knowing this, meditates on the udgitha [Om when it is part of Vedic recitation] as the Syllable. This, with regard to the Self” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.2.14).

“Om is the immortal, the fearless. Having entered this, the gods became immortal, fearless. He who knows it thus, praises this Syllable, takes refuge in that Syllable, in the immortal, fearless sound, and having entered it, he becomes immortal, even as the gods became immortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.4.5).

“The sun is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1).

“The breath in the mouth… is continually sounding Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3).

“Om controls the worlds which are above the sun,” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.6.8).
“He who knows Om attains the worlds beyond the sun and also the desired objects of the gods” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.7.7).

“It is this Om which is progressively higher and better. This again is endless. He who, knowing thus, meditates upon the progressively higher and better Om, obtains progressively higher and better lives and wins progressively higher and better worlds. This Om is the highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, meditates on Om, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this Om to Udara Sandilya, he also said: ‘As long as they shall know this Om among your descendants, so long their life in this world will be the highest and best.’ And so will their state in that other world be. One who thus knows and meditates—his life in this world becomes the highest and best, and so his state in that other world, yea, in that other world.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.1-4).

Once the sage Usasti was approached and asked what “deity” presided over Om. “The sun, said Usasti, all these movable and immovable sing the praise of the sun when he has risen. This is the deity that belongs to Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.11.6, 7).

In Chandogya Upanishad 2.9.5 and 2.14.1, Om is said to be “the midday sun”—the idea being that Om is the plenitude of the Divine Light, the optimum manifestation-embodiment of that Light.

“The sun is Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.20.1; 2.21.1).

“Just as all the parts of the leaf are permeated by the ribs of the leaf, so is all speech held together by Om. Verily, the Syllable Om is all this—yea, the Syllable Om is verily all this” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.2, 3).

“Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun…. When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these
very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2, 5).

**Katha Upanishad**

“I will tell you briefly of that Goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for which people practice discipline: It is Om. Om, indeed, is the lower [Saguna] Brahman; this is, indeed, the higher [Nirguna] Brahman. Anyone who, meditating on Om, wishes either of the two [aspects], by him that is attained. This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the Higher and Lesser Brahman. Meditating on Om, one becomes worthy of worship in the world of Brahman” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.15-17).

**Mandukya Upanishad**

The Mukti Upanishad, one of the minor Upanishads, says this about the Mandukya Upanishad, which is completely devoted to the subject of Om: “The only means by which the final emancipation is attained, is through the Mandukya Upanishad alone, which is enough for the salvation of all aspirants.” And the Mandukya Upanishad says:

“Om: this Syllable is all this. All that is past, the present and the future, all this is only the Syllable Om. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the Syllable Om. The Self [Atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om….Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his Self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 1, 8, 12).

**Mundaka Upanishad**

“Taking as the bow the great weapon of the Upanishads [Om], one should place in it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Drawing it with
Om Yoga Meditation: Its Theory and Practice

a mind engaged in the contemplation of That [Brahman], O beloved, know that Imperishable Brahman as the target. The Syllable Om is the bow: one’s Self, indeed, is the arrow. Brahman is spoken of as the target of that. It is to be hit without making a mistake. Thus one becomes united with it [Brahman] as the arrow becomes one with the target. He in whom the sky, the earth, and the interspace are woven, as also the mind along with all the pranas, know him alone as the one Self. Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality. Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore beyond darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6).

Prashna Upanishad

“Satyakama, son of Shibi, asked [the Rishi Pippalada]: ‘Venerable Sir, what world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That?’ To him, he said: ‘That which is the sound Om, O Satyakama, is verily the higher and the lower Brahman. Therefore, with this support alone does the wise man reach the one or the other.’…If he meditates on the Supreme Being [Parampurusha] with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, who is higher than the highest life.… That the wise one attains, even by the mere sound Om as support, that which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1, 2, 5, 7).

Shvetashvatara Upanishad

“Om is the supreme Brahman, and in it are the Triad [the individual spirit, the cosmos, and the Cosmic Spirit]. It is the firm support, the imperishable. The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman, intent thereon [i.e., on Om] and freed from birth” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:7).

“As the form of fire when latent in its source is not seen and yet its seed is not destroyed, but may be seized again and again in its source by
means of the drill [a pointed stick whirled to produce fire for the Vedic sacrifices], so it is in both cases. The Self has to be seized in the body by means of Om. By making one’s body the lower friction stick and Om the upper friction stick, by practicing the friction of meditation one may see the hidden God” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:13, 14).

“The knower of the real nature of Brahman that is identical with Om, after keeping his body erect, by holding the three parts [the chest, the neck, and the head] in an upright posture, placing all the organs of perception and action along with the mind in his heart, should cross all the formidable streams [of samsara] with the ferryboat of Om” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 2:8).

“God is the Syllable Om, out of him proceeds the Supreme Knowledge” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 4:17).

**Taittiriya Upanishad**

“Om is the most exalted in the Vedas, pervades all worlds and emerged from the immortal Vedas as their quintessence” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.4.1).

“Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

**Bhagavad Gita**

“I am Om” (Bhagavad Gita 7:8).

“Having confined the mind in the heart and…engaged in the practice of concentration, uttering the one-syllabled Om—the Brahman—and remembering me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the Supreme Goal. I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers me not thinking of anything else” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12-14).

“I am Omkara [Om]” (Bhagavad Gita 9:17).

“Among words I am the Ekakshara [Om]” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25).
Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

“Ishwara,… being unconditioned by time is teacher even of the ancients. His spoken form is Om. Its japa [repetition] and meditation is the way. From it results the disappearance of obstacles and the turning inward of consciousness. For removing these obstacles there should be the constant practice of this one thing” (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali 1:24-32).

Manu Smriti

The Laws of Manu (Manu Smriti) is the oldest code of laws in India.

“The monosyllable Om is the highest Brahman” (Manu Smriti 2:83, 87).

Yoga Vashishtha

The Yogashishtha is the oldest book on yoga, second only to the Yoga Sutras in authority.

“The holy word, Om, bestows the highest state” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:54).

“Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:78).

“[The turiyatita state] is the Eternal, beyond the eternal and the transient; it is a pure mass of consciousness. In it there is no question of diversity. It is all, it is supreme blessedness and peace, it is beyond expression. It is purest Om. It is transcendent. It is supreme” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:34).

“The one that is awakened is the inner Self, that is the Supreme Self whose name is Om” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:2:48).

Minanath (Matsyendranath, founder of the Nath Yogi Sampradaya).

“Clearly [this Om] is the lord of supreme peace, the ultimate one” (Yogavishaya 18).
Gorakhnath (Gorakshanath), greatest of the Nath Yogis

“Om is the supreme light. Whether [he be] either pure or impure, one who recites Om continually is not besmeared by sin, even as the leaf of the lotus [is not wet] by water” (Goraksha Shataka 88, 89).

Gaudapada (the guru of Shankara)

“Om should be known. Having known Om, one should not think of anything whatsoever” (Mandukya Karika 1:24).

“One should concentrate one’s mind on Om, for Om is Brahman” (Mandukya Karika 1:25).

“Om is surely the lower Brahman; and Om is considered to be the higher Brahman. Om is without cause, and without inside and outside; and it is undecaying. Om is indeed the beginning, middle, and end—everything. Having known this way indeed one attains immediately identity with the Self. One should know Om to be God seated in the hearts of all. Meditating on the all-pervasive Om, the intelligent man grieves no more. The Om, without measures and possessed of infinite dimension, is the auspicious entity where all duality ceases. He by whom Om is known, is the real sage, and not so is any other man” (Mandukya Karika 1:26-29).

Shankara

“Om is used to serve as a means to the meditation on Brahman. As other scriptures say, This is the best help (to the realization of Brahman) and the highest” (Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).

“One should concentrate on the Self, uttering Om’ [Mahanarayan Upanishad 24:1]. ‘One should meditate upon the Supreme Being only through the Syllable Om’ [Prashna Upanishad 5:5] ‘Meditate upon the Self with the help of the Syllable Om’ [Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6]. And so on. Although the words Brahman, Atman, etc. are names of Brahman, yet on the authority of the scriptures we know that Om is its most intimate appellation. Therefore it is the best means for the realization of Brahman” (Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).
“Whether the unconditioned Brahman or the conditioned Brahman [is the goal], the Syllable Om becomes a means of realizing it… Therefore Om, being so important, should be used as a means to Self-realization” (Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).

“It is known in all the Upanishads that Om, as a name and as a symbol, holds the highest position of being an aid to the meditation of the Supreme Self. And its highest position is also well known from its being used very frequently at the beginning and end of repetition of holy names, rites, [scriptural] study, etc. Therefore this Syllable Om is to be meditated on in its verbal form. That is, one should continuously concentrate one’s mind on Om which forms a part of rites and is a symbol of the Supreme Reality.…

“The soul, when it departs from the body, goes upward by meditating on the Self with the help of Om as he did while living” (Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad).

“Just as the bow is the cause of the arrow’s hitting the target, so Om is the bow that brings about the soul’s entry into the Immutable. For the soul when purified by the repetition of Om gets fixed in Brahman with the help of Om without any hindrance, just as an arrow shot from a bow gets transfixed in the target” (Commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad).

“Om is essentially the same as the Self….And the Supreme Brahman, too, is but Om….Om is the same as the supreme as well as the inferior Brahman…by virtue of its being a means for the attainment of Brahman” (Commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad).

“When the Syllable Om is known, one should not think of anything whatsoever, serving any seen or unseen purpose; for he has got all his desires fulfilled.

“One should concentrate the mind on Om, which is essentially the supreme Reality, for Om is Brahman beyond fear….In this way indeed, having known Om that is the Self, one attains identity with the Self at that very moment.

“One should know Om as God existing in the heart of all living beings.
“Om being beyond measures is Turiya, it has infinite dimension and its extent cannot be determined. It is auspicious and holy because of the negation of all duality. He who knows Om is a sage because of his meditating on the Supreme Reality, and not any other man, though he may be learned in the scriptures” (Commentary on the Mandukya Karika).

“One should concentrate the mind on Om, which is essentially the supreme Reality….By means of the boat of Om that is Brahman one crosses over [samsara, the ocean of birth and death]. The idea is that by controlling the senses through Om the enlightened person should cross over the currents of the river of transmigration with the help of that Om” (Commentary on the Shvetashvatara Upanishad).

“Wishing to attain the supreme Self one utters [does japa of] Om; and he does indeed attain Brahman through that Om” (Commentary on the Taittiriya Upanishad).

“How should one perform devotion to the Lord, and what is the means of that devotion? To explain the form in which the devotee contemplates on him, the sutra says: ‘His spoken form is Om.’ Of the Lord who has been described, the designating Word is Om.…

“When the Lord is continuously worshipped in the mind by means of this Syllable, Om, he gives his grace. There are many sacred texts indicating that Om is Brahman.…

“Through Om the Lord is met face to face.

“It is proper to employ Om as a means for practicing worship of God. “When the yogi has understood the identity of Om and Brahman he attracts the grace of the supreme Lord through its japa and meditation. Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by it. Yogis who are engaged in both japa and meditation attain one-pointedness of mind. After japa, which causes his mind to bow before the Lord, let him engage in meditation. When his mind becomes unwavering from meditation on the Lord, let him do japa of Om, for japa leads to meditation. When japa and meditation of Om come to perfection then the Supreme Lord (Parameshwara),
the Supreme Self (Paramatman) who stands in the highest place shines forth for the yogi.

“Om is the Name of the Supreme Lord” (Commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

Vyasa

“That which is manifested by the Pranava is the Lord (Ishwara) himself” (Commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

“Swadhyaya is repetition of the Pranava” (Commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

“When the yogi has recognized the power of Om to express its meaning, the Lord, he should undertake japa and meditation of it on the Lord who is signified by Om. When the yogi thus engages in japa and meditation of Om, his mind becomes one-pointed. So it has been said: After Om japa, let him set himself in yoga [meditation], after yoga, let him set himself to japa. When Om japa and meditation come to perfection the Supreme Self [Paramatman] shines forth” (Commentary on the Yoga Sutras).
Immortal and eternal

We are immortal. How do we know that? It is intuited by anyone with an unclouded awareness. For as long as the human race has existed on this earth, our immortality has been part of common knowledge based on intuition and also by various experiences people have had throughout history: near-death experience, actual dying and returning to life, and seeing or receiving communication from departed persons in both the waking and sleeping states. Some have entered the worlds of the departed, observed and spoken with them, and returned to tell about it.

But we are more than immortal. We are eternal. That is, we will not just live forever from this point on, we have also existed forever, from eternity. Eternity is not time without end, but that state of being or existence which transcends this realm of time and space. In eternity neither beginning nor end is possible; it is the state of Divine Being, of God, of whom it was long ago said in the Rig Veda: “His shadow is immortality.”

How is it possible for us to be eternal? Because our very existence is rooted in the eternity of God. We have always existed within God because in some ineffable way we are part of God, one with him yet distinct from
him. It is like the ocean and its waves: the waves are not the ocean, but the ocean is the waves. Eternally we have been the parts and God has been the Whole. We are never separate from him, but we are always distinct from him. We are all spirit, but we are finite and God is infinite. God lives in us and we live in God. We are divine; we are gods within God.

**Meditation: the key**

We must *know* this, not just believe it. How can we know this? We can know it through practice of the spiritual science of meditation. Like mathematics, this science is based on the fundamental nature of relative existence in which we presently find ourselves for the purpose of the evolution of our consciousness. To understand this we need to know a bit of cosmic history.

**The seed of life**

Within eternity, within the depths of Spirit, there arises an impulse—or rather the potential of an impulse—which then like a germinating seed expands into a field of subtle energy possessing the two fundamental qualities of movement and sound. Moving outward into increasingly objective forms of these two forces, the living universe takes shape, functions, and eventually comes into fruition when it has so perfectly evolved that it returns to its original state of unmanifested perfection. During this cycle of projection and withdrawal the spirits, the seeds of consciousness that have been cast into this field by the Sower-Creator, also evolve to the point of return into Eternal Being. For the cosmos is a great school of consciousness in which the spirits learn to truly be gods within God, manifesting their eternal potential.

**Taking charge**

The first stages of this drama occur solely under the aegis of the Divine Director. But in time a point is reached in which each of the actors on the cosmic stage begins to direct his own drama and elaborate
it to such a degree that they can return to their Source with the capacity
to experience and share in the Infinity that is native only to God. They
do not become God, but they become godlike in the fullest extent. To
attain this they take charge of their own evolution by the practice of Yoga.

The basis of yoga

Yoga is based on the fundamental nature of relative existence: the
dynamic field of the single evolutionary force or impulse manifesting
as movement and sound. All the phenomena of the universe are but
variations, evolutes, of these two aspects of the one impulse which is
the basis of the duality which makes both the universe and evolution
within it possible, and the perfected unity which is its final purpose.

In the individual human being the root-impulse manifests as breath
and the subtle sound vibration produced by inhalation and exhalation.
This is the force that impels the individual spirit into the realm of evolu-
tion and then produces the evolution itself, and by conscious cultivation
of which the awakened individual can continue his own evolution to
its ultimate perfection: revealed godhood.

Long ago in the hidden mists of earth’s history this secret of Yoga was
revealed to those developed enough to perceive it within the depths of
their own being. Discovering the way to transcendence, they seized it
and applied it. Consciously entering into the stream of divine evolution,
they became in the truest sense Ascended Masters, no longer gods in
potential but in actuality. They passed on their knowledge of Yoga to
others who in turn passed it on to succeeding generations, even unto
today. Since it works with the yogi’s fundamental makeup and nature,
there is no need for any external empowerment such as “initiation.” The
only thing needed is practice.

The essence of yoga

Om meditation has two elements, just as does the universe of which
we are a living, evolving part. The first is awareness of breath, and the
second is the production of mental sound which links breath awareness to the subtle sound produced spontaneously by the breath. This subtle sound is Om. Both the inhaling breath and the exhaling breath make the subtle sound of Om. Though two, they are really one, and Om makes two into one, changing duality into unity on all levels of manifestation. Om leads us into duality for our evolution and then leads us back into unity as the final step in our evolution. The simple yet profound practice of Om Yoga, of Om japa and meditation, will be found to correct, heal and restore all the levels of our existence, physical, mental and spiritual.

**Necessity of meditation**

The supreme master of yoga, Gorakhnath, said: “He who aspires to any attainment without the practice of yoga meditation cannot succeed in hundreds of years” (Gorakh Rahasyam 4). Meditation is the process of centering our awareness in the principle of pure consciousness which is our essential being. In this way we will never lose sight of our real identity. That is why Lalla Yogeshwari used to sing:

My teacher spoke to me but one precept.
He said unto me, “From without enter the inmost part.”
That to me became a rule and a precept.
And therefore naked began I to dance. (Lalla Vakyani 94)

Divesting herself of all thoughts and impressions, external and internal, Lalla entered her eternal Self, and thus “naked” began to dance the dance of inner bliss that is the nature of the Self. As the Gita says: “He whose happiness is within, whose delight is within, whose illumination is within—that yogi, identical in being with Brahman, attains Brahman-irvana” (Bhagavad Gita 5:24).

Normally we lose awareness of our true Self through consciousness of external objects. Since we are habituated—if not actually addicted—to objective consciousness, we can use that very condition to our advantage.
Rather than disperse our consciousness through objects that draw us outward, away from the source of our being, we can take an object that will have the opposite effect, present it to the mind, and reverse our consciousness.

Such an object must have two qualities: (1) It must be something whose nature it is to turn our awareness inward and draw it into the most subtle depths of our being, and (2) it must be something that can continue to be perceived even in the most subtle areas of our awareness. Therefore it must be an object that can accompany our questing consciousness inward, not being transcended when the mind and senses are gone beyond. That object is Om. By sitting with closed eyes and letting the mind become easefully absorbed in experiencing the inner repetitions of Om we thereby directly enter into the state of consciousness that is Om, the state of consciousness that is Brahman the Absolute.

Sound and consciousness are, practically speaking, the same. Since the individual spirit (jivatman) and God (Paramatman) are essentially one, we can conclude that Om, repeated within the mind in japa and meditation, will produce the consciousness of both Atman-Selves and restore their lost unity.

Meditation is the process of restoring our consciousness to the center, our eternal spirit-Self, and keeping it there so our evolution will proceed exactly according to the divine plan without any more delays or deviations. Here are some statements of the upanishads regarding meditation.

“This Self, deep-hidden in all beings, is not revealed to all; but to the seers, pure in heart, concentrated in mind–to them is he revealed” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:12).

“Wise, self-controlled, and tranquil souls, who practice austerity and meditation, attain by the path of liberation to the immortal, the truly existing, the changeless Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11).

“With mind illumined by the power of meditation, the wise know the Self, the blissful, the immortal” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.7).
“This Effulgent Self is to be realized by meditation and by superconscous vision” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5).

“In meditation the Self is revealed” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8).

“By the rightly meditative, the Self is fully known” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.4).

“One who knows, meditates upon, and realizes the truth of the Self—such a one delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:25:1, 2).

“Knowledge of the Self is gained through meditation” (Swetashwatara Upanishad 1:15, 16).

Knowing this, Lalla Yogeshwari also used to sing: “An ascetic [yati] wanders from holy place to holy place to seek the union brought about by visiting himself” (Lalla Vakyani 36).

**Paramatman and jivatman**

Why are there so many yoga methods? It is because of differing diagnoses of the root problem of human beings. Buddha said that it was important to ask the right questions to get the right answers. In the same way we must know the real problem of humanity if we are to formulate the solution. If we accept secondary problems as the primary ones our answers will be secondary ones and unable to clear up the fundamental problem whose solution will bring about the solution of all other troubles.

For example, our problem is not that we do not know one of the symbolic forms of God mistakenly called gods, or an avatar or master. Our problem is that we do not know and experience our individual being (jivatma) within the Cosmic Being (Paramatman).

The root cause of our ignorance and its attendant miseries is forgetfulness of our true Self and God, the Self of our Self. Since the two are really one, it follows that our meditation must consist of that which is common to both the Self (Atman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman). And that is Om.
Yoga is a very real union of the Absolute with the relative in a divine alchemy that erases all difference between jivatman and Paramatman while ineffably retaining it. Therefore our yogic practice must be an invocation of both the Absolute and the relative, of Shiva and Shakti. This is accomplished through Om. We are moving toward union every time we intone Om with the inhalation and exhalation, for inhalation and exhalation are Shiva and Shakti. Within the context of yoga the inhalation is the descent of Shiva and the exhalation is the ascent of Shakti.

The right approach

Now this is very important: When we want to swim in the ocean, we do not dive into a particular wave, but into the ocean itself. A wave, being only a manifestation on the surface of the ocean, must be left behind if we are to sound the depths of the ocean. If we stay with the wave, we will find ourselves being thrown onto the shore and out of the ocean. It is the same with meditation on names and forms—whether of gods, avatars or liberated masters. We need to dive down where name and form cannot go.

We must meditate on the Self—not on external beings or forms. As Sri Ma Sarada Devi said: “After attaining wisdom one sees that gods and deities are all maya” (Precepts For Perfection 672). Sri Ramana Maharshi said: “Since the Self is the reality of all the gods, the meditation on the Self which is oneself is the greatest of all meditations. All other meditations are included in this. It is for gaining this that the other meditations are prescribed. So, if this is gained, the others are not necessary. Knowing one’s Self is knowing God. Without knowing one’s Self that meditates, imagining that there is a deity which is different and meditating on it, is compared by the great ones to the act of measuring with one’s foot one’s own shadow, and to the search for a trivial conch after throwing away a priceless gem that is already in one’s possession” (Collected Works, section 28).
Since we must realize the individual Self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman), we do japa of Om which embodies both. That is why Sri Gajanana Maharaj of Nasik said: “Some people say that meditating upon Nirakara [the Formless Reality] is difficult. But in my opinion it is very easy and in addition it is natural. A man easily gets into the state of samadhi by meditating upon Nirakara. The path of doing so is, however, concealed and secret. Once you get it you can be in that state although outwardly you may be talking, laughing, playing, or sleeping. This power is concealed like the river Saraswati [which flows underground and is unseen]. As some people have not understood this secret path, therefore, they say that it is difficult, and that it would require the passing of various lives to obtain success in it.”

In effective meditation the mantra and the Self of the yogi should be actually one—the mantra must proceed from the Self. The Shiva Sutras say: “If the mantra is kept separate from the repeater of the mantra and its goal, one cannot attain the fruit of the mantra” (Shiva Sutras 1:4). The divine Self is both the origin and the goal of Om.

**Om—the Word**

This sacred Syllable is spelled out as Om, but it is usually written in the ideogrammatic forms:

![Om symbol](om-sound.png)
or ![Om symbol](om-sound.png)

It is most important in repeating Om to pronounce the O correctly. It should be pronounced like the long o in the Italian or common American manner, as in home and lone. In fact, Om rhymes exactly with home. (In England, Canada, and parts of the American South, the long o is sometimes pronounced as a diphthong, like two vowels jammed together: either like “ay-oh” or “eh-oh.” This is not the correct manner of pronouncing the O, which should be a single, pure vowel sound.)
Om is most effective if it is mentally intoned: mentally “sung” on a single note (the pitch does not matter—whatever is spontaneous and natural). This makes the repetition stronger and of deeper effect, because intoning Om unifies the mind and naturally concentrates it.

**Aum?**

In Sanskrit texts the Pranava is usually spelled Aum so many people mispronounce it as “Awm,” among other mispronunciations. Aum is the phonetic spelling indicating that the spoken O begins with a barely perceptible sound of the short Sanskrit A. But you are going to work with it mostly mentally, which begins with the pure long O sound. When your inner mind has become accustomed to it you will speak it aloud that way, also. It will be second nature to you. This is the trait of the adept Om yogi.

**The example of contemporary Masters, Saints and Yogis**

As just said above, the sacred monosyllable is pronounced to rhyme with *home*. In all the time I have spent both in India and America with many pandits, yogis and sadhus, the only pronunciation I have ever heard from any of them is the simple *Om*. Masters and yogis I have frequently heard speaking, intoning or singing Om include:

- Sri Anandamayi Ma and the sadhus that usually accompanied her.
- Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and his disciples: Swami Chidananda, Swami Venkatesananda, an advanced disciple of Sivananda, Swami Sivananda—Hridayananda, Swami Vidyananda, Swami Satchidananda, an advanced disciple of Sivananda and founder of the Integral Yoga Institute, and Swami Nada-Brahmananda, an advanced disciple of Sivananda and an adept in Nada Yoga, the Yoga of Sound.
- Sri Maitri Devi of Delhi, an accomplished yogini and disciple of the renowned sannyasini Swami Purnananda.
- Sant Keshavadas of Andra Pradesh.
- Swami Swahananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Southern
California and disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

Furthermore, recordings show that Om was the pronunciation of: Swami Sivananda, Paramhansa Yogananda, Swami Ramdas of Anandashram, and Sri Dilip Kumar Roy, the famous musician-composer disciple of Sri Aurobindo.

**Continual invocation**

The way to receive the benefit of a mantra is japa, the continual repetition-intonation of the mantra. In this way the invoker is constantly imbued with the power and consciousness inherent in the mantra. It is best to intone Om mentally, silently, and to intone it throughout all your waking hours—not just during meditation. Whenever we intone Om we align and link our consciousness to our spirit-soul with its innate potential, and with its Source the Divine Spirit and its powers.

**Om Yoga Meditation Practice**

Om Yoga Meditation Practice consists of two practices: Khechari Mudra and Om Japa-Pranayama.

**Khechari Mudra**

1. Sit upright, comfortable and relaxed, with your hands on your knees or thighs or resting, one on the other, in your lap.
2. Your mouth should be closed so that all breathing is done through the nose. This, too, aids in quieting the mind.
3. Though your mouth is closed, the jaw muscles should be relaxed so the upper and lower teeth are not clenched or touching one another, but parted.
4. Turn your eyes slightly upward, then close your eyes gently. This removes visual distractions and reduces your brain-wave activity by about seventy-five percent, thus helping to calm the mind. It
also begins to open your awareness of the Sahasrara Chakra which includes the entire physical, astral and causal brain.

5. Keep your eyes gently turned upward like this throughout your entire meditation, including the following practice of Om Japa-Pranayama.

**Om Japa-Pranayama**

6. Breathe naturally. Your mouth should be closed so that all breathing is done through the nose. This, too, aids in quieting the mind. Though your mouth is closed, the jaw muscles should be relaxed so the upper and lower teeth are not clenched or touching one another, but parted.

7. Be aware of your breath naturally (automatically) flowing in and out as you breathe through your nose. Your breathing should always be easeful and natural, not deliberate or artificial.

8. Then in a very quiet and gentle manner begin mentally intoning (“singing” on a single note) in time with your natural and spontaneous breathing, but making Om encompass the entire breath in this way:

   As you inhale, intone the O of Om throughout your inhalation. The moment your exhalation begins (or is about to begin) intone the M of Om throughout the exhalation. In this way you unify the breath, turning duality into unity.

   It is important to be intoning OM the syllable, not: O. M. O. M. O. M. You must be intoning Om, prolonging it and having it encompass the whole breath, not just making two disconnected sounds. In time this will become second nature.

   Intoning Om in this way integrates the inhaling and exhaling breaths, balancing them and leading your awareness inward. It also leads to awareness of the breath as essentially the vibrating impulse of Om. For breath and Om are the same thing.

9. Continue doing this, listening in a relaxed and peaceful manner to your inner mental intonations of Om, letting your awareness become
fully absorbed in the mentally intoned sound of Om. No need to pull or push the mind, it will naturally come to rest in the sound. Just let the mind relax and sink or melt into it.

10. In time your inner, mental intonations of Om may change to an even more mellow or soft, subtle form, even to an inner whispering that is almost (or becomes) silent. But Om is always fully present and effective, and you will still be intoning Om in your intention.

11. You may find that your intonations of Om move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective. This is all right. Just intone in the manner that is natural at the moment.

12. In the same way you will find that your breath will also become more subtle and refined, and slow down. Sometimes your breath can become so light that it almost seems as though you are not breathing at all, just thinking the breath.

13. Keep your eyes upturned in Khechari Mudra without strain, letting (not making) your awareness become focused in the Sahasrara/Brain area.

14. Do not let your attention become distracted from your intonations of Om and your Sahasrara awareness. Thoughts, impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike may arise, but calmly ignore them. Do not try to stop them, but gently and calmly keep your attention centered in your intonations of Om in time with your breath.

15. Even though something feels very right or good when it occurs, it should not be forcibly prolonged or hung on to or made to repeat in later meditations. The sum and substance of it all is this: It is not the experience we are after, but the effect. Also, since we are all different, no one can say exactly what a person’s experiences in meditation are going to be like.

16. If you find yourself getting restless, distracted, fuzzy, anxious or tense in any degree, just take a deep breath and let it out fully, feeling that you are releasing and breathing out all tensions, and continue
intoning Om as before in time with the breath in a relaxed and easeful manner, without strain.

17. Remember: Om Yoga meditation basically consists of two things: 1) sitting with the eyes closed and turned up in Khechari Mudra throughout; and 2) mentally intoning Om in time with the breath and listening to those mental intonations.

18. At the end of your meditation get up and go about your usual daily routine while continuing to intone Om in time with your breath and listening to those inner intonations of Om.

A further look at this method of intoning Om with the breath

The value of Om Japa-Pranayama is especially in its ability to unify the breath as a manifestation of Om. Equally, it unifies the consciousness of the yogi, gathering it into awareness of Self. And this is done by simply joining the intonation of O to the natural inhalation and the intonation of M to the natural exhalation, joining the complete syllable Om to the complete breath. Furthermore, it effortlessly causes the subtle life force (prana) to continually rise upward into the head and enliven and awaken the Sahasrara chakra, the highest chakra. It also unites the physical and subtle (astral and causal) bodies, prevents loss and deple- tion of the subtle energies, and orients them toward the Sahasrara. As pointed out, it is important to keep the whole syllable, Om, in mind during your intonations: not O. M. O. M. O. M., but Om Om Om.

Regarding this method, in his book Meditation on Om Swami Sivananda says: “This will raise your consciousness to a very high plane. You will become one with the Soul, the Atman.” Therefore it is good to make this your constant mode of Om Japa.
Chapter Five:

The Subtle Anatomy of the Yogi and the Effects of Om Yoga

“The visible form of fire, while it lies latent in its source, the firewood, is not perceived; yet there is no destruction of its subtle form. That very fire can be brought out by means of persistent rubbing of the wood, its source. In like manner, the Self, which exists in two states like fire, can be grasped in this very body by means of Om. 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” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:13-14).

One of the most valuable books for the aspiring yogi is Philosophy of Gorakhnath by Akshaya Kumar Banerjea, himself an accomplished yogi in the Nath Yogi tradition. Speaking of the reunion of the subtle forces within the individual—including his physical body—Banerjea observes: “The material body is as much a playful self-revelation of the Supreme Spirit (with Shakti) as life and mind and has no really separate non-spiritual existence. The body is perceived as a non-spiritual reality, so long as the mind is concentrated upon its material spatio-temporal character. When the mind is concentrated upon the Spirit within it, not only the mind, but the body also is spiritualized, i.e. its spiritual nature is unveiled.”
Consequently the yogi gives attention to the physical, astral, and causal bodies that are the vehicles of his consciousness—the consciousness he intends to unite with its Source.

**Yoga of both body and mind**

There are many Sanskrit words with which the yogi must become conversant. Two are Samskara and Vasana. Samskaras are impressions in the mind, either conscious or subconscious, produced by previous action or experience in this or previous lives. They are propensities of the mental residue of impressions, subliminal activators, prenatal tendencies. Vasanas are bundles or aggregates of similar samskaras manifesting as subtle desire. It is a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment which induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment. A vasana is a subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action, and is the cause of birth and experience in general.

One of the most renowned yogis of the twentieth century was Swami (“Papa”) Ramdas of Anandashram (Kanhangad, Kerala). In *Gospel of Ramdas* he says the following regarding the body, yoga and vasanas.

“Vasanas may be driven out of the mind. But they persist in the body. One whose mind is free from vasanas is said to have *manosiddhi*; one whose body is free from vasanas is said to have *kayasiddhi*. One who has *kayasiddhi* is said to have completely eradicated all his vasanas both from his mind and body. That is perfection in yoga. Some jnanis stop at eradicating the vasanas from the mind and do not care about their ejection from the body. But there are some siddhas who have perfected the body also. By so doing, they say they are divinizing the body. They make the light of the atman permeate the body to such an extent that every particle of the body is made holy and shines with the divine radiance” (p. 374).

“Jnanis stop with the experience of nirvikalpa samadhi and they consider the body and all the universe as illusion or non-existent. Even after the experience of nirvikalpa samadhi, though the mind is free
from vasanas, the body is not. Of course, jnanis do not care about it as the body and everything connected with it is unreal. But the yogis are not satisfied with this realization. Thy make the body also pure and illuminated. That is Purna [Full, Complete] Yoga. Then every particle of his body is radiant with spiritual splendor. Now the yogi has attained perfection of the body also, the grandest spiritual experience” (pp. 595, 596). Therefore the following information in this chapter is of inestimable value to the Om yogi.

**Esoteric science**

Esoteric science is a necessary factor of all viable spiritual traditions: those that truly open the way to higher consciousness, which is the essence and the purpose of evolution. A major part of that science is the knowledge of our spiritual anatomy, our subtle energy levels through which spiritual consciousness can be invoked and expressed. Those levels are like rungs on a ladder leading to higher degrees of consciousness when understood properly.

Yoga, the supreme esoteric science, speaks of special channels and centers of life energy in our subtle anatomy that must be cultivated in preparation for the attainment of enlightenment. The ancient yogic seers, including the Nath Yogis who claim that Jesus was one of their most revered gurus (see *The Christ of India*), taught that these channels and centers are means of spiritual realization. Therefore the yogi must master, refine, and evolve these channels and centers to attain perfect spiritual realization.

The greatest of these yogis, the greatest yogi of all time, was Gorakhnath. Gorakhnath asked his teacher Matsyendranath: “How can a yogi have meditation that goes beyond the physical?” The answer was most relevant to the subject of this chapter: “He should meditate within his body to rise above the body” (Gorakh Bodha 99, 100). Later Matsyendranath told him: “To destroy deception or duality one should reside within” (114).
The sole purpose of the cosmos is evolution, and this is especially true of the human body. Though frequently mistaken for an obstacle or distraction by spiritual seekers, the body is a perfect evolution machine when its components are known and worked with. At the same time it is essential for us to know what is significant and what is not, otherwise we can become lost in the complexity of the several energy systems that comprise the human organism.

The yogic sages have explained the subtle anatomy of a yogi’s bodies which he must refine and evolve to assist in his ultimate liberation. In the twelfth chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda wrote about his guru Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri: “Master numbered many doctors among his disciples. ‘Those who have ferreted out the physical laws can easily investigate the science of the soul,’ he told them. ‘A subtle spiritual mechanism is hidden just behind the bodily structure.’” The internal alchemy of yoga is a process that occurs when the entire internal mechanism (antahkarana) is perfectly synchronized. Then the transmutation is inevitable and the internal mechanism opens the way into the kingdom of heaven: limitless consciousness.

Just as God is embodied in the multilevel manifestation we call creation or the universe, manifesting himself as the physical, astral, and causal cosmos while yet transcending it, in the same way each sentient being is embodied in a universe of his own, exteriorly finite but interiorly infinite. Neither God (the Paramatman) nor the individual spirit (the jivatman) evolve, for they are eternally perfect and unchangeable, but their “bodies” do evolve over ages beyond calculation. The evolution of the cosmic cosmos is consciously intentional, but the evolution of the individual cosmos is subliminal and therefore unconscious until it reaches a point where the individual spirit can comprehend and take charge of it consciously—in other words the point at which it becomes a yogi.

**Responsiveness to yoga practice**

We cannot lessen the innate effectiveness of Om Yoga, but we can certainly lessen or even prevent our responsiveness to it and the effect it

57
will have on us. The bodies, physical, astral, and causal, are the vehicles through which the individual evolves during the span of life on earth, and must be taken into serious account by the yogi who will discover that they can exert a powerful, controlling effect on the mind. If wax and clay are cold they cannot be molded, nor will they take any impression. If molasses is cold it will hardly pour. It is all a matter of responsiveness. Only when warm are these substances malleable. In the same way, unless our inner and outer bodies are made responsive or reactive to the japa and meditation of Om we will miss many of the beneficial effects. Hence we should do everything we can to increase our response levels, to ensure that our physical and psychic bodies are moving at the highest possible rate of vibration and are functioning in harmony at the maximum level, and with perfect polarity and interaction between them.

**Kriya Yoga**

A kriya is a purificatory action, practice, exercise, or rite. Kriyas purify the body and nervous system as well as the subtle bodies to enable the yogi to reach and hold on to higher levels of consciousness and being. Therefore “Kriya Yoga” essentially means “Yoga of Purification” which removes all obstacles to Self-realization, the path to the Absolute. In the Yoga Sutras Patanjali says: “Austerity (tapasya), self-study (swadhyaya), and offering of the life to God (Ishwara pranidhana) are Kriya Yoga” (Yoga Sutras 2:1). Commenting on this verse from the Yoga Sutras, Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahasaya said: “Constant japa of the Pranava, Omkar, which is self-revealing, and constant focus on it as the form of Ishwara, and dedicating all actions to it as if you are not the doer yourself, is Kriya Yoga.” Here we see from the words of the Yogiraj that Om is the heart of Kriya Yoga as described by Patanjali.

**Ida, Pingala and Sushumna**

In the spine there are three major passages or nadis through which life energy and the primal energy known as Kundalini move upward
and downward. The one on the left of the spine is known as the Ida, the one on the right as the Pingala, and the one in the center is the Sushumna. Life force moves downward in the Ida and upward in the Pingala. Kundalini moves upward in the Sushumna.

We do not awaken Kundalini—it awakens us. In the same way we need not open the Sushumna, for if the Sushumna was not open we would either be a vegetable or dead. Neither is there a need to deliberately “raise” the Kundalini, because the evolving life force of Kundalini always moves upward in the Sushumna, though in many people it is so minimal and slow that it has very little observable effect. But whenever there is creativity or intelligence manifesting in a human being—and most of all when there is spiritual inspiration or insight—it is being produced by the upward flow of the Kundalini in the Sushumna.

The rate of ascent and the volume of the Kundalini’s rising is according to the evolutionary development of the individual and the condition of his bodies, gross and subtle. We accelerate the function of the Sushumna and Kundalini through the practice of Om Yoga, especially Om Japa Pranayama.

When the Ida and Pingala are in perfect synchronization, the flow of life force in the Sushumna is greatly enhanced and unhindered. Gorakhnath wrote about it this way: “The Sun rises in the Sushumna, and the current of consciousness comes to dwell in the Sahasrara lotus and the bhramargufa [Sahasrara] is illuminated with the radiance of the Self.”

**Kundalini**

“He who knows this knowledge of the life force [prana], the great science, is a knower of the Vedas” (Goraksha Paddhati 1.46). “This cosmic Shakti exists in the individual bodies of all breathing creatures (Prani) in the form of Kundalini (Kundalirupa)” (Arthur Avalon, *The Garland of Letters*, p. 113). According to various scriptures and writings of master yogis, the KulaKundalini is inherent in all things as the force that points them to the Goal and moves them along toward the Goal.
We engage in Om Yoga practice to put ourselves and our bodies back into harmony with the innate evolutionary impulse of the universe—with Om—and attune them to the Kundalini that flows in response to our practice. In this way we clear the pathway for the rising Kundalini from the Muladhara to the Brahmarandhra.

What is Kundalini? Actually, it is quite a simple thing: it is the evolving power inherent in the universe and in all forms of life. It is the Kundalini that functions in the chakras and the subtle channels that connect them known as nadis. It is only the mode of movement that varies in them. Kundalini in no way “sleeps” and does not need awakening—only a clearing of the way for its perfect functioning. It pervades everything and is active in everything. Ultimately it is seen to be the universe and that which transcends the universe.

Kundalini is not energy in essence, but consciousness. However, when consciousness moves it is seen as energy. As Gorakhnath explained at length, Shakti (Energy) is really Shiva (Consciousness) acting in a dynamic way. This is a profound and essential truth which must be grasped by the yogi. Kundalini is the Living God in whom we live, move, and have our being. The essential sound-form (vachaka or mantra) of Kundalini is Om.

Om is the original extension or emanation of Kundalini, which is both mula prakriti, root-energy, and mula chaitanya, root-consciousness. Therefore Gorakhnath says in the Goraksha Sataka: “Knowledge of the breath is the great knowledge [mahavidya]” (46). In Om Yoga the breath is one of the keys to liberation. This is in contrast to those who consider the breath to be an obstacle to realization and the cause of restlessness. It is not the breath itself but the breath in a state of distortion and disharmony that produces the trouble. Certainly, without the breath nothing can be accomplished by the yogi. Correction of the breath through Om japa in time with it is an essential element of yoga practice.

This is why Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, the guru of Paramhansa Yogananda, wrote in a song:
Pranayama be thy religion,
Pranayama will give thee salvation,
Pranayama is the Wishing Tree.

Pranayama is Beloved God,
Pranayama is Creator Lord,
Pranayama is the Cosmic World.

Control the littl pranayama,
Become all-pervading pranayama,
You won’t have to fear anything anymore.

The rising of Kundalini is a matter of consciousness and not energy. When the Kundalini rises the consciousness expands, unfolds, and evolves. Om japa and meditation remove all blockages in the subtle channels (nadis) of the subtle bodies, and cause the bodies themselves to vibrate to Om as their fundamental frequency. Just as Om manifests and pervades the physical, astral, and causal creation, so the vibrations of Om pervade all our bodies, awakening and evolving them. Om Yoga is Kundalini Yoga, pure and simple.

During the practice of Om Yoga, every chakra and nadi is affected and glows with subtle light. As the process continues, they increase in brightness and begin to develop as a seed does when exposed to heat and light. The same is true of every cell and every atom in the yogi’s being on all levels, physical, astral and causal. Consequently we may experience these changes in meditation, but we should let awareness of them arise and subside spontaneously during the japa and meditation of Om. Otherwise we confine and limit their effects within us.

**Chakras and adharas**

Just as the outer universe is a complex of many interrelated points such as suns and planets, in the same way the material and subtle bodies...
of the yogi—which reflect and react on one another—are a network of life energy points known as chakras. Chakras are points in the bodies into which the universal life force (vishwaprana) flows. Without that constant inflow the bodies would become dormant and disintegrate—would die. The chakras are both entrances and exits for the cosmic life power as well as reservoirs of that power and points of intelligent direction of the power. There are many subsidiary satellites of the chakras called adharas. Adharas are reservoirs of pranic energies, storage units for the energies that flow into the subtle bodies through the chakras, and therefore can be (and often are) mistaken for a chakra.

The Nath Yogi tradition teaches that there are nine major chakras:
1. The Muladhara, located at the base of the spine
2. The Swadhishthana, located in the spine a little less than midway between the base of the spine and the area opposite the navel.
3. The Manipura, located in the spine at the point opposite the navel.
4. The Anahata, located in the spine opposite the midpoint of the sternum bone.
5. The Vishuddha chakra, located in the spine opposite the hollow of the throat.
6. The Talu chakra, located at the root of the palate (opposite the tip of the nose).
7. The Ajna chakra, located at the point between the eyebrows—the “third eye.”
8. The Nirvana chakra, located in the midst of the brain: opposite the middle of the forehead, directly beneath the crown of the head.
9. The Brahmarandhra chakra, located at the crown of the head.

The term Sahasrara chakra refers to the thousand-petalled lotus in the head, corresponding to the brain—the supreme chakra which contains the Ajna, Nirvana and Brahmarandhra chakras, though “sahasrara chakra” is often used to indicate the Brahmarandhra alone. According to the Nath Yogi tradition, the Sahasrara chakra is the supreme chakra, and all other chakras are actually within the Sahasrara, the chakras outside
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the Sahasrara such as those in the spine being reflections of the primary, archetypal chakras in the Sahasrara. Therefore continual attention is given to the Sahasrara in Om Yoga practice.

The nature and function of the nine chakras

1. Base (Muladhara) chakra. The Muladhara chakra deals with the purely physical, atomic structure of the body. Therefore its energies deal with healing, correcting and empowering the very cells and organs of the body. Positive energies of this chakra manifest as insight into all material phenomena and independence of them; negative energies manifest as totally material perceptions and impulses toward avid attachment to material things and disbelief in anything higher than matter.

2. Swadhishtana chakra. The Swadhishtana chakra deals with neurological energies, emotions and desires, including sex/lust. It involves all that is self-centered and egotistical in a person. Through its purification are corrected those areas of our physical and emotional life. It also deals with the fluids in the body including the lymph and blood when there is an abnormality there. Positive energies of this chakra manifest as gentleness, sensitivity to others’ feelings, helpfulness and even self-sacrifice; negative energies manifest as negative emotions such as anger, resentment, hatred, jealousy, envy and—most of all—lust.

3. Navel (Manipura) chakra. The Manipura chakra deals with the metabolism and the assimilative powers of the body. It, too, relates to desires, especially the desire to acquire, control and encompass. It relates to the digestive system as well. So those are the aspects of a person that correction of this chakra can affect. Positive energies of this chakra manifest as strength of will and purpose and a highly developed sense of order and right conduct; negative energies manifest as greed, possessiveness, negative ambition and materialistic involvements.
4. Heart (Anahata) chakra. The Anahata chakra deals with metabolism and controls the cardio-pulmonary system. It too deals with feelings, but feelings of higher affection and altruism. (It is still in the lower levels, so do not mistake its movements for true or spiritual love or devotion to God.) It also deals with the faculty of sight and therefore basic perception as well as lesser intuition. It has a lot to do with the immune and circulatory systems and controls the thymus gland in the center of the chest. Positive energies of this chakra manifest as loving-kindness, generosity, and unselfish actions for the benefit of others; negative energies manifest as the desire to dominate others and to use them for selfish advantage.

5. Throat (Vishuddha) chakra. The Vishuddha chakra deals with intellectual development and the power of speech. The thyroid is controlled by it also. The will is also involved to some extent. Higher intuition comes into play here to some extent, as well. Positive energies of this chakra manifest as wise, uplifting and healing speech, words that have the power to manifest what is being spoken; negative energies manifest as foolish, meaningless words, lies, manipulative and negative, harmful speech.

6. Talu chakra. The Talu chakra is a kind of switching station like on a railway. Subtle transmuting energies and the Kundalini move up the spine from the Muladhara to the Vishuddha chakra. Then they need to move forward and reach the Ajna chakra. In the centuries since knowledge of the Talu chakra was almost lost, sadhakas throughout India have expressed frustration with the fact that the energies rise to the Vishuddha and will not move to the Ajna. This is because the way the subtle bodies are constituted, the Talu chakra must be prepared and activated before the energies can move forward to the front of the head. But that has usually not been known. I personally have heard of several people making this complaint and knew one man who sought advice from many renowned yogis over the years but received no help.
7. **Third eye (Ajna) chakra.** The Ajna chakra controls, coordinates and partakes of all the functions of those beneath it. It particularly deals with spiritual intuition and spiritual will. Positive energies of this chakra manifest as clear intuition, spiritual perceptions and spiritual will power; negative energies manifest as chaotic or negative psychic experiences as well as whimsical, capricious and negative applications of will.

8. **Nirvana chakra.** The Nirvana chakra is the center in which liberation (moksha) is attained and experienced. Without knowledge of this chakra there is a problem in the liberating energies moving from the front of the head back and upward to the Brahmarandhra chakra through which the yogi’s spirit rises to merge with the Absolute. Like the Talu chakra, the Nirvana chakra must be prepared and activated before the energies can so move. The Nirvana Chakra is also called the Jalandhara chakra. Jalandhara means “Holder of the Net” in the sense of perfect mastery of both the subtle energy network of nadis and chakras and of samsara itself, the “net” in which all sentient beings are caught until the Nirvana Chakra is reached in full awareness. Jalandhara also means: “holder of the aggregation,” as it also controls the seven chakras beneath it.

9. **Crown chakra.** The energies of the Sushumna crown chakra are purely spiritual and unconditioned by any influences other than our finite spirit and the Infinite Spirit from which we derive our very existence. So there is never any trouble there. It need only be reached and empowered by the Kundalini to establish the precedence of these holy powers over the lower levels of our existence.

These nine chakras are the actual “nine gates” of the body spoken about in the Bhagavad Gita (5:13), not the nine openings found in the body. The nine chakras are major factors in the subtle energy system of a human being, the ruling power centers, though there are a great number of minor chakras throughout the gross and subtle bodies of each one of us.
**More on the Sahasrara**

The Sahasrara, the Thousand-Petalled Lotus of the astral brain, contains reflex points that control every aspect of the yogi’s physical, astral and causal makeup. Consequently the yogi’s attention is continually oriented toward the Sahasrara in Om Yoga practice. In the esoteric writings of both Hinduism and Buddhism we find references to “the jewel in the lotus.” The lotus is the Sahasrara and the awakened consciousness of the yogi is the jewel. As Blavatsky wrote in *The Secret Doctrine*: “Each of us has within himself the ‘Jewel in the Lotus,’ call it Padmapani, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, or whatever name we may give to our Divine Self.”

The Sahasrara Chakra is the place where individual consciousness and Cosmic Consciousness meet and are one. Everything is there. The individual complex of each person originates in the Sahasrara, and the Sahasrara itself is a map or miniature of the cosmos—physical, astral, and causal. It is the dwelling place of pure consciousness (spirit), both individual and cosmic. Consequently, liberation is experienced in the Sahasrara. The process of meditation takes place throughout the body, but predominantly within the Sahasrara since it is the seat of the spirit-Self.

It is the Paradise from which we fell into material consciousness and to which we must be restored through yoga. That is, the yogi’s entire consciousness becomes centered there. Gorakhnath described it as when “the current of consciousness comes to dwell in the Sahasrara lotus and is illuminated with the radiance of the Self.”

Through the Sahasrara the subtle energies of the higher planes flow into the brain and body, making it the origin and seat of all supernatural experiences and abilities as well as the point of communication with higher planes and higher consciousness.

**Om and the chakras**

Om is the special mantra of the Sahasrara, but the intonation of Om affects all seven chakras simultaneously and brings them into harmony with one another and refines their energies. Om is the ruling mantra of
all the aspects of our being. The japa and meditation of Om awakens, empowers, and perfects the entire mechanism of our physical and subtle makeup. This includes the elimination of those psychic snarls, whorls, blocks, and conditionings that are our karma. Those who through Om Yoga practice continually attune and merge their consciousness in this way will in time become totally identified with the individual spirit-Self and with the Supreme Spirit. This merging is the beginning of Cosmic Consciousness.

**The Chidakasha and the Sahasrara**

“Whatever one may be doing, the attention should be fixed in the head” (Paramhansa Nityananda, Chidakasha Gita 217).

Since we are essentially consciousness, authentic yoga deals directly with consciousness. And when we speak of consciousness we do not mean “consciousness of spirit,” as though spirit were an object and consciousness of spirit only a condition of awareness, but we mean spirit itself which *is* consciousness, the eternal subject.

In yoga treatises we frequently encounter the term “Chidakasha,” which means “the Space (Ether) of Consciousness.” This is the level of existence and consciousness so pure and subtle, so interwoven with Spirit, that it is indistinguishable from Spirit, which is why the yogis say that the spirit-Self dwells *in* the Chidakasha and *is* the Chidakasha.
The Bhagavad Gita says in the beginning of the fifteenth chapter that the entire field of relative existence is like a tree whose roots are above and whose branches and leaves are below in the material world. This is not only true of the macrocosm, but also of each one of us that are microcosms—reflections of the macrocosm. Our “roots” are in our brain, the Sahasrara, and our body, limbs, and senses are the trunk, branches, and leaves. The Chidakasha, the indwelling spirit of the Sahasrara is literally the taproot into the Infinite, the gateway of higher consciousness—both ascending and descending.

In the introduction to his book, *Pranava Gita*, Swami Pranavananda Giri, “the saint with two bodies” written about in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, sums up the whole purpose of our involvement with intoning Om to experience the Chidakasha: “The omnipotent inordinate cause is Paramatma. That Paramatma is within this body. The exact location of this Paramatma in the body and how the mind may be made to merge with It, has been determined by the yogis. Sadhakas have seen through their practice that this Paramatma, despite the fact that it is omnipresent, exists in the Chidakasha in a conscious form, and the Pranava is its expression.” The Chidakasha is the abode of our Self, the center-point of our incarnation in relative existence.

**Sahasrara awareness**

Awareness of the Sahasrara is spiritual consciousness itself. From the enlivened Sahasrara the sacred light and power of Spirit will flow into every cell of every level of our being. The Bhagavad Gita describes the yogi as “drawing his prana into the head, established in yoga concentration, uttering OM, the single-syllabled Brahman” (8:12-13). By intoning Om in time with the breath we activate literally thousands of channels in the physical and subtle bodies, causing the life force to spontaneously, effortlessly, flow upward into the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain (Sahasrara Chakra) and then merge into the Chidakasha, into the Divine Light within the Sahasrara that is the essence of Om, the Life-Giving Word, the Pranava.
Since you cannot do Khechari Mudra outside meditation, if you like you can keep a general awareness of the Sahasrara outside meditation, feeling that the breath and intonations of Om are taking place there. In this way you can keep centered in the Chidakasha state you experience in meditation.

Urdhvareta

“Urdhvareta” refers to a yogi in whose subtle energy system the pranas, the life energies, are predominately flowing upwards. Your immortal, eternal spirit abides in the Sahasrara united with God the Absolute Spirit—the finite with the Infinite. In the Bible the urdhvareta state is symbolized by the words of Isaiah the prophet: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it” (Isaiah 2:2). The Sahasrara is the Lord’s house (place of abode) on the top of the head (Mount Zion), and the nations, the various forms of prana that flow upward through the practice of Om Yoga because they are empowered and polarized by the intonations of Om, which causes the pranas to flow upward into the head where the Sahasrara and Chidakasha are located. They are direct and efficient, causing the pranas to flow upward virtually immediately and in a much greater quantity and speed than other methods, raising the subtle energies into the head for the maximum degree of evolution and mastery. Therefore Om Yoga is the key to becoming established in the Urdhvareta state.

Khechari Mudra

There are three kinds of mudras: hatha yogic, tantric and dhyana yogic. The hatha yoga mudras are body positions (asanas), the tantric mudras are hand and finger positions for both ritual and meditation, and the meditation (dhyana) mudras are eye positions. For example, in the miraculous photograph of Lahiri Mahasaya found in the first edition of
**Autobiography of a Yogi**, the great yogi is demonstrating the eye position known as Sambhavi Mudra.

If you read much on yoga you must eventually come across the expression “Khechari Mudra.” Turning the eyes upward the yogic Khechari Mudra. In Sanskrit, *kha* means the sky, space, or ether (akasha). *Char* means “to move.” So *khechari* means “sky walking”–moving in the etheric space that is the limitless basis of everything, the akasha that is consciousness itself–Chidakasha. Khechari Mudra is the procedure which enables the yogi to be a *khechara*–one who flies in the Sky of Consciousness. For Khechari Mudra opens the “sky” of the Sahasrara, the Thousand-Petalled Lotus. Sensitive yogis can experience this.

Khechari Mudra is commonly thought to be the hatha yoga practice of extending the tongue and making it enter the post-nasal cavity. This is considered the sign of a yoga adept, but it really just causes post-nasal drip and can render some people unconscious.

The real Khechari Mudra of the yogis is the simple turning up of the eyes in a gentle, unforced manner without any strain at all. To determine the angle of your upturned eyes, just hold your forefinger along your eyebrows, touching them and covering the area between them, and gently look up at your finger. (If this seems a strain in the beginning, look up at a lesser angle.) After a while you may automatically turn your eyes up higher and that will be just fine. But there must never be any strain.

This turning up of the eyes opens and activates the higher levels of awareness in the Sahasrara that are collectively known as the Chidaka-sha, the Ether of Consciousness that is the eternal, immortal spirit. It is important to understand that we are not straining the eyes upward to look at or through the third eye. We are simply looking upward and letting things take their course. I personally call it “flying the friendly skies” of the opening and expanding Sahasrara/Chidakasha. You will find that many openings can occur from this practice, and you may even feel as though flying in limitless space.
In the book of Revelation the Beloved Disciple recounts this symbolic experience of Khechari Mudra: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit” (Revelation 4:1-2). Then he described seeing God (Ishwara) enthroned in the Chidakasha surrounded by twenty-four great beings (“elders”). The things he described in symbol will be perceived by the adept yogi. The twenty-four elders are twenty-four chakras found in the Sahasrara, and in their midst is the “throne” of Divine Consciousness wherein dwell the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This experience corresponds to the state of pratyahara (interiorization) which results according to Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras when asana and pranayama have been sufficiently mastered through Khechari Mudra and Om Japa-Pranayama.

Khechari Mudra produces increased awareness of the Sahasrara. Your immortal, eternal spirit abides there united with God the Absolute Spirit—the finite with the Infinite. This little practice opens true spiritual consciousness. In the Bible this is also symbolized by the already-cited words of Isaiah the prophet: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it” (Isaiah 2:2). The Sahasrara is the Lord’s house (place of abode) on the top of the head—Mount Zion, and the nations, the various forms of prana that flow upward through the practice of Om Yoga. Whatever does or does not happen is exactly right. Just look up, relax and experience, keeping focused on Om. In yoga no strain is ever needed—in fact it will be a hindrance.

Khechari Mudra should be done throughout your meditation, once you are used to it.

You might be interested to know that during one part of his training with Sri Yukteswar, Yogananda had to keep his eyes turned up in Khechari Mudra throughout the day, with open eyes, yet had to fulfill
all his ashram duties. One result was a lot of bruising from running into the sides of doorways. But in this way he learned by experience the effect of Khechari Mudra. He said in public talks that keeping the eyes downward leads to subconsciousness, keeping them straight ahead establishes in waking consciousness and keeping them upward leads to superconsciousness. In the 1936 BBC documentary he goes into samadhi by turning his eyes up in Khechari Mudra even though they remain open.
Chapter Six:

Understanding the Aspects of Om Yoga Meditation

The yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita is the pinnacle of Indian philosophy and yoga. This small book, consisting of only seven hundred verses of four lines each, covers every aspect of spiritual life. It is a lifetime study, imparting life-giving knowledge, including instruction in meditation. In the opening verses of the fourth chapter Krishna tells Arjuna that “this imperishable yoga… is the supreme secret” (4:1-3), and the yogi “should practice yoga for the purpose of self-purification” (6:12).

The yogi sits in an upright posture practicing Khechari Mudra: “holding the body, head and neck erect, motionless and steady, looking toward the origin of his nose [nasikagram] and not looking around” (6:13), closing his eyes.

Since yogis “offer inhalation into exhalation, and exhalation into inhalation” (4:29), he practices Om Japa-Pranayama with Khechari Mudra, “turning up the eyes toward the two brows, equalizing the inhalation and exhalation moving within the nostrils” (5:27), calming and refining the breath. The words translated “equalizing” are *samau kritva:*
“making them the same.” That is, by encompassing the entire breath, inhalation and exhalation, in a single intonation of Om as explained in Chapter Four—making what is two into one. In this way, “drawing his prana into the head, established in yoga concentration, uttering Om, the single-syllabled Brahman” (8:12-13), the yogi meditates upon the Supreme. “With mind quieted, banishing fear, firm in the brahmachari’s vow, controlling the mind, with thoughts fixed on me, steadfast, he should sit, devoted to me. Always disciplining himself thus, the yogi whose mind is subdued goes to the supreme peace of nirvana, and attains to union with me” (6:14-15).

He who does so throughout his life, at the end of that life engages in his final practice of Om Yoga: “With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him. At the time of death with mind unmoving, endowed with devotion and yoga power, having made the prana enter between the eyebrows [through Khechari Mudra and Om Japa-Pranayama], he goes to the Divine Supreme Spirit. That which the knowers of the Veda call the Eternal [Imperishable], which the ascetics free from passion enter, desiring which they live the life of brahmacharya, that path I shall explain unto you briefly. Closing all the doors of the body, confining the mind in the heart [within the center of the Sahasrara], drawing his prana into the head, established in yoga concentration, uttering OM, the single-syllabled Brahman, meditating on me, departing thus from his body, he attains the Goal Supreme” (8:8, 9-13). And Krishna through Vyasa assures us: “He who thinks of me constantly, whose mind never goes elsewhere, for him, the constantly-joined [yoked] yogi, I am easy to attain” (8:14).

A few verses previously he said: “At the time of death he who remembers me while giving up the body attains my Being—of this there is no doubt. Moreover, whatever he fixes his mind on when he gives up the body at the end, to that he goes [that he attains]. Always he becomes that [is transformed into that]. Therefore at all times remember me
with your mind [manas] and intellect [buddhi] fixed on me. Thus without doubt you shall come to me. With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him” (8:5-8). Before the Gita, the Prashna Upanishad said the same: “What world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That? If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the light of the sun, he is led to the world of Brahman Who is higher than the highest life, That which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1, 5, 7).

Can it be that simple and easy? Yes, because it goes directly to the root of our bondage which is a single and therefore simple thing: loss of awareness.

Now let us look at the various components of our Om Yoga practice so we can understand it fully.

**The place for meditation**

It will be most helpful to your practice if you have a special place exclusively for meditation. Your mind will begin to associate that place with meditation and will more easily enter a quiet and peaceful state when you sit there. If you can set aside an entire room for practicing meditation, or even a large well-ventilated closet, that is good, but just an area in a room is adequate. The important thing is that the area be devoted exclusively to your meditation.

The room should be moderate in temperature and free from drafts, both cold and hot. It is also important that it be well ventilated so you do not get sleepy from lack of oxygen in the air.

Your meditation place should be as quiet as possible. Do not play music or other kinds of sounds during your meditation, as that definitely interferes with your entering the Silence and perceiving the subtle forms of Om. As a rule earplugs are not recommended for the practice of meditation since you can become distracted by the sensation of pressure
in the ears, or the chirping, cricket-like noises that go on all the time in
the ears, or the sound of your heartbeat. But if you need them, use them.
Your place of meditation should ideally be a place where you can most
easily forget outer distractions, but if it is not, you can still manage to
practice meditation successfully.

It should be softly or dimly lighted. (Full darkness might tend to
make you go to sleep.) It is also good to turn off any electric lights, as
their pulsation, even though not perceived by the eyes, affects the brain
waves and subtly influences the mind, holding it to the level that corre-
sponds to the rate of pulsation. If you like having a candle or wick lamp
burning when you meditate, they should be a kind that does not flicker.

Some yogis like to burn incense when they meditate. This is a good
practice if the smoke does not irritate their lungs or noses. Unfortunately,
much incense, including that from India, contains artificial, toxic ingre-
dients that are unhealthy. Two excellent kinds of incense made only of
natural ingredients are Auroshika and Nandita. Both can be ordered
from Amazon.com.

It is good to keep some sacred symbols or imagery in your meditation
place—whatever reminds you that God is present.

**Meditation posture**

For meditation we sit in a comfortable, upright position. This is
for two reasons: so we will not fall asleep, and to facilitate the upward
movement of the subtle life force called prana, of which the breath is
a manifestation.

It is important that our meditation posture be comfortable and easy
to maintain. Though sitting upright, be sure you are always relaxed.
Yoga Sutra 2:46 says: “Posture [asana] should be steady and comfort-
able.” The *Yoga Vashishtha* (6:1:128) simply says: “He should sit on a
soft seat in a comfortable posture conducive to equilibrium.” Shankara
comments: “Let him practice a posture in which, when established, his
mind and limbs will become steady, and which does not cause pain.”
Here relaxation is the key, for Yoga Sutra 2:47 says: “Posture is mastered by relaxation.”

There are several cross-legged postures recommended for meditation. They are the Lotus (Padmasana), Perfect (Siddhasana), Auspicious (Swastikasana), and Easy (Sukhasana). You will find them described in books on Hatha Yoga postures. I especially recommend *Yoga Asanas* by Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, as it is written from the perspective of spiritual development and also gives many hints to help those who are taking up meditation later in life and whose bodies need special training or compensation. The Iyengar books on the yoga postures are excellent.

If you can sit in a cross-legged position without your legs going to sleep and making you have to shift them frequently, that is very good. Some yogis prefer to sit on the floor using a pillow. This, too, is fine if your legs do not go to sleep and distract you. But meditation done in a chair is equally as good. Better to sit at ease in a chair and be inwardly aware than to sit cross-legged and be mostly aware of your poor, protesting legs.

If you use a chair, it should be comfortable, of moderate height, one that allows you to sit upright with ease while relaxed, with your feet flat on the floor. There is no objection to your back touching the back of the chair, either, as long as your spine will be straight. If you can easily sit upright without any support and prefer to do so, that is all right, too, but be sure you are always relaxed.

If you have any back difficulties, make compensation for them, and do not mind if you cannot sit fully upright. We work with what we have, the whole idea being to sit comfortably and at ease.

Put your hands on your thighs, your knees, or in your lap: joined, separated, one over the other, whatever you prefer. The palms can be turned up or down. Really it does not matter how you place or position your hands, just as long as they are comfortable and you can forget about them. There is no need to bother with hand mudras, as they are irrelevant to Om Yoga practice.
Hold your head so the chin is parallel to the ground or, as Shankara directs, “the chin should be held a fist’s breadth away from the chest.” Make a fist, hold it against your neck, and let your chin rest on your curled-together thumb and forefinger. You need not be painfully exact, about this. The idea is to hold your head at such an angle that it will not fall forward when you relax. Otherwise you will be afflicted with what meditators call “the bobs,” the upper body continually falling forward during meditation.

Meditation is not a military exercise, so we need not be hard on ourselves about not moving in meditation. It is only natural for our muscles to sometimes get stiff or for some discomfort to develop. Go right ahead and move a bit to get rid of the discomfort.

Some yogis prefer facing east or north to meditate, but it has been my experience that in Om Yoga it simply does not matter what direction I face. Yet you might want to experiment on your own.

Whatever your seat for meditation—chair, pillow, pad, or mat—it will be good if it can be used only for meditation. Then it will pick up the beneficial vibrations of your meditation, and when you sit on it your mind will become calm and your meditation easier. For the same reason some people like using a special shawl or meditation clothing or a robe when meditating. If you cannot devote a chair to your meditation, find some kind of cloth or throw that you can put over the chair when you meditate and remove when you are done.

**Reclining meditation**

If we lie down for meditation we will likely go to sleep. Yet, for those with back problems or some other situation interfering with their sitting upright, or who have trouble sitting upright for a long time, it is possible to meditate in a reclining position at a forty-five-degree angle. This is a practice of some yogis in India when they want to meditate unbrokenly for a very long time. (I know of two yogis who meditated throughout the entire day this way.) There may still
be a tendency to sleep, but we do what we can, when we can. Here is the procedure:

Using a foam wedge with a forty-five-degree angle, or enough pillows to lie at that angle, or in a bed that raises up to that angle, lie on your back with your arms at your side, or across your stomach if that is more comfortable. Then engage in the meditation process just as you would if sitting upright.

When you are ill or for some reason unable to sit upright you can meditate in this way.

**Alternating positions in meditation**

Those not yet accustomed to sitting still for a long time, or those who want to meditate an especially long time, can alternate their meditation positions. After sitting as long as is comfortable, they can do some reclining meditation and then sit for some more time, according to their inclination.

**Relaxation**

Relaxation is the key to successful meditation just as is ease and simplicity. We need to be relaxed in both body and mind to eliminate the distracting thoughts and impressions that arise mostly from tension.

It is only natural that you will find your mind moving up and down or in and out during the practice of meditation, sometimes being calm and sometimes being restless. Do not mind this at all; it is in the nature of things. At such times you must consciously become even more calm, relaxed, and aware. Lighten up in the most literal sense. As already said, when restlessness or distractions occur, take a deep breath through your nose, let it out, relax, and keep on meditating.

It is also natural when we begin turning our awareness inward that we will encounter thoughts, memories, various emotions, feelings, mental states, and other kinds of experiences such as lights, sensations of lightness and heaviness, of expansion, of peace and joy, visual images (waking
dreams), and such like. None of these should be either accepted or rejected. Instead we should calmly continue our intonations of Om. The inner sound of Om and the states of consciousness it produces are the only things that matter, for they alone bring us to the Goal. We should never become caught up in the various phenomena, however amazing, entertaining, pleasant (or how inane, boring, and unpleasant) they may be, and be distracted from meditation. Experiences must not be held on to, nor should they be pushed away, either. Instead we should be quietly aware of them and keep on with meditation so in time we can pass far beyond such things. This is relaxation in attitude.

Also, feelings of boredom, stagnation, annoyance and inner discomfort may be the resistance of negative energies which will be cleared away by meditation as we persevere, and should not be taken seriously and allowed to influence us and even get us to end a meditation period to get away from them. Sometimes we perceive or experience negativity in some form because we need to realize that those things are buried in our subconscious, and meditation will automatically take care of them.

Never try to make one meditation period be like one before it. Each session of meditation is different, even though it will have elements or experiences in common with other sessions.

Do not be unhappy with yourself if in meditation it seems you are just floating on the top rather than going deep. That is what you need at the moment. Keep on; everything is all right. Remember: Om is not just intelligent, it is Divine Intelligence, and whatever is best for you to experience is what it will produce, either late or soon, but always at the perfect time.

It is important in meditation to be relaxed, natural, and spontaneous, to neither desire or try to make the meditation go in a certain direction or to try to keep it from going in a particular direction. To relax and be quietly observant is the key for the correct practice of meditation.

Yet, correct meditation practice is never passive or mentally inert. At all times you are consciously and intentionally intoning Om. It should
be easeful and relaxed, but still intentional, even when your intonations become more gentle and subtle, even whisperlike or virtually silent.

**Closed mouth and eyes**

Breathing through the mouth agitates the mind, so keeping your mouth closed and breathing only through the nose has a calming effect. So also does closing your eyes, for by closing your eyes you remove visual distractions and eliminate over seventy-five percent of the usual brain wave activity.

**Eye positions—Nasikagram**

The Bhagavad Gita speaks of the yogi “holding the body, head and neck erect, motionless and steady, gazing at the origin of his nose [nasikagram] and not looking around” (Bhagavad Gita 6:13). Disagreement has existed for centuries as to whether this means the yogi should look downward toward the tip of his nose or upward to between his eyebrows. Nasikagram means literally “the origin of the nose,” so it depends on where you consider the nose “begins”—at the point between the eyebrows or the tip of the nose. Since earlier (5:27) the Gita has described the yogi as “turning up the eyes toward the two brows, equalizing the inhalation and exhalation moving within the nostrils,” in the practice of Om Japa-Pranayama, Om yogis always look up in Khechari Mudra during Om Yoga meditation.

**Sound**

Sound is the basis of all that is, and the way to the realization of the All That Is, including our true Self and the Supreme Self, God. “By sound one becomes liberated [Anavrittih shabdai]” (Brahma Sutras 4.4.22). Sound joined to the breath is the beginning, middle, and end of our meditation practice. Consequently, listening to and experiencing the effects of our inner intonations of Om is the heart of Om Yoga.
Inwardly listening to the mental intonations of Om is the major key to success in meditation because listening to the mantra makes the yogi responsive to its vibrations. In that way the maximum benefit is gained. It is essential that we become centered in the etheric levels of our being, from which sound arises, and this is done by inwardly intoning Om and listening to those intonations. During meditation, whatever happens, whatever comes or goes, relax and keep *listening* to your inner intonations of Om. It is the sound of Om that accomplishes everything. And by listening to it you become totally receptive and responsive to it so it can work its transforming purpose to the maximum degree. The Om yogi should be totally absorbed in both the inner *intoning* and the inner *hearing* of Om.

If things do not feel or seem to be going right, it may mean that you are not fully listening to the sound of Om, that your attention is somewhat divided. At such times I have had everything feel and go right immediately when I relaxed and easefully centered my awareness totally on the sound of Om.

**Shabda and Nada**

Shabda and Nada are both usually translated in yoga texts as “sound” and in many philosophical texts are used interchangeably, but in yogic usage they have a very important distinction. Shabda is sound of any kind made by any means proceeding from any medium: for example, the sound made when a drum is struck or the wind blows. Shabda encompasses the entire range of natural sounds, including the inherent sound-vibration of physical objects and processes. Nada, however, is very specialized. It is exclusively sound emanated by Divine Impulse, sound that comes directly from Universal Consciousness with no intermediate stages or secondary causes. In a very real sense Nada is the Voice of God. According to the yogis, Om is Nada in this precise, technical sense. It is, therefore, the voice of the Self as well as the voice of God.

Putting the awareness on mere shabda—which includes the sounds of the chakras and other inner sounds, even though they emanate from
very subtle levels—leads only to their relative source and not to Reality. Only that Nada which comes directly from the Source will lead to the Source, and it must encompass both the Absolute and the relative, Brahman and the jivatman. And that Nada is Om.

**Prana and Mahapranā**

In the lesser levels of the individual and the cosmos, prana moves as the force of life, but in the higher levels Mahapranā moves as the unalloyed Divine Life, one aspect of which is Om. Because of this, repetition of Om both lifts the yogi up to and invokes the Mahapranā, enabling the yogi to truly live the Divine Life.

Om is not the sound of the physical breath, but the sound (Nada) of the Mahapranā as it manifests as inhalation and exhalation. As just explained, there are two kinds of sound: ahata (shabda) and anahata (nada). Ahata occurs in nature, is material sound even when subtle, but anahata is Divine Sound (Divya Shabda) and is spiritual, conveying spiritual opening and insight. Such is Om. Only the proficient yogi whose perceptions have been refined can hear these true sounds (Sat Nada) during his practice. For Om Sadhana opens the yogi to the inflow of Mahapranā and increases the inflow the longer it is practiced.

**Om**

The entire realm of manifestation is really nothing more than an infinite variety of sound, variations of a single Sound that is the origin and ending of all other sounds. That Sound is Om, the basic resonant frequency of the entire field of existence: “Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3). “Om: this Syllable is all this” (Mandukya Upanishad 1).

It is the keynote of the consciousness that is our true Self: “The Self [Atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om…. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit]
Om Yoga Meditation: Its Theory and Practice

with his Self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 8, 12). “Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

And since we and God are one, it is the keynote of divine consciousness as well. “Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1). “That [Om] is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3). “Om is the supreme Brahman” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:7). “Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

Om, then, is the entire focus of our meditation. “One should meditate on this Syllable [Om]” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1). “Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6). And since it has no intellectual meaning, its repetition helps us in getting beyond the conceptualizing mind.

I. K. Taimni has this to say regarding Om, the Pranava: “The first and most effective means which Patanjali prescribed for overcoming the distracted condition of the mind is the japa and meditation of the Pranava. He calls the Pranava the vachaka of Ishwara. What is a vachaka? A vachaka is a name which has a mystic relationship with the vachya—the entity designated—and has inherent in it the power of revealing the consciousness and releasing the power of the individual for whom it stands. Such a vachaka is Om. It is considered to be the most mystical, sacred and powerful mantra by the Hindus because it is the vachaka of Ishwara, the Greatest Power and the Supreme Consciousness.

“It may seem preposterous to the ordinary man not familiar with the inner side of life that a mere syllable can carry hidden within it the potential power which is attributed to it by all yogis, and references to which are found scattered through the sacred scriptures of the Hindus. But facts are facts and they are not at all affected by the ignorance and prejudices of people who disbelieve in them. Who could have believed fifty years ago that a mere neutron moving among a number of uranium atoms could produce an explosion powerful enough to blow up
a whole city? Anyone who understands the theory of mantra yoga and the relation of vibration with consciousness should be able to see that there is nothing inherently impossible in the idea of a mystic syllable possessing such a power. Besides, we should remember that the facts of the inner life with which Yoga deals are based upon experience no less than the facts of Science.”

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras Shankara puts it very simply: “Through Om the Lord is met face to face.” And even further: “When the yogi has understood the identity of Om and Brahman he attracts the grace of the supreme Lord through its repetition and meditation.” And finally: “Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It.”

Om is expanding outward in waves from the core of the cosmos. The same is happening with us. From our atma Om is being impulsed outward. By coming into alignment/synchronicity with the atmic impulse through the intonations of Om, we can return to our true state of being.

**Breath and sound**

Breath and sound are the two major spiritual powers possessed by us, so they are combined for Om Yoga practice. Since Pranava can mean The Breath Word, it is very natural to intone Om in time with the breathing. The way is simple and easy and is often to be preferred.

The breath is a dominant factor on all the planes of existence. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical. It possesses the essential qualities of both energy and consciousness and is thus able to serve as an instrument for their actions and reactions on each other.

Although we tend to think of attention as merely a state of the mind, the opposite of inattention, it is really a great psychic force. Quantum physics has discovered that when a human being sets his attention on anything, that object is immediately affected to some degree, so much so that a scientist can unintentionally influence the result of an experiment
however controlled the external conditions may be. Thoughts are indeed things, but attention is the fundamental power of thought. Buddha gave great emphasis to the effect of sati—attention—in meditation.

As we calmly fix our awareness on the breath and the sound of Om, they become increasingly refined. Since it is natural for them to do so, you need not attempt to deliberately make this happen. Your attention and intonations of Om will automatically refine them. As we become more and more aware of the subtle forms or movements of the inner breath and sound, it automatically happens that the breath movements on all levels become slower. This is the highest form of pranayama, cultivation of the breath. All authentic yoga practice involves the breath to some degree, because the breath truly is life (prana).

The purpose of being aware of the physical breath is to enable you to become aware of “the breath of the breath,” the inner movement of consciousness that manifests as the physical breath. The more attention we give to the breath, the subtler it becomes until it reveals itself as an act of the mind, not the body, and finally as consisting of mind-stuff (chitta) itself and Om as the consciousness behind the breath. Both breath and sound, like an onion, have many layers. In the practice of Om meditation we experience these layers, beginning with the most objective, physical layer and progressing to increasingly subtle layers, until, as with an onion at its core, there are no more layers, but only the pure being of the Self.

The breath and sound become increasingly refined as we observe them, and as a result our awareness also becomes refined. Our attention focused on the breath and Om causes their potential to manifest in the way sunlight causes the petals of a flower to open.

We are waves in the ocean of consciousness and sound. We are Om. So in Om Yoga practice, especially when we experience the permutations of the subtle sounds of Om, we are actually experiencing ourselves. The more we meditate, the higher and higher and further and further we penetrate into the infinite consciousness of which we are an eternal
Breathe and brain

The yogis knew ages ago what Western science took a long time to realize. In the fourth century an anatomist named Oribasius said that the brain literally moves in harmony with respiration. In 1690 a researcher named Slevogt published a book in which he said the same. But the mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg wrote about this as both a physical and a metaphysical phenomenon in his *Oeconomia Regni Animalis* which contains a section titled *De Motu Cerebri*. That was in 1741, and in 1750 J. Daniel Schlichting, a physician of Amsterdam, declared that at each expiration the whole brain becomes elevated or expanded, while during inspiration it subsides and collapses. He showed that this motion is due neither to the contraction of the *dura mater*, nor to a pulsation of the sinuses or of the arteries, but is an intrinsic motion of the entire mass of the brain; that this motion continues during the whole existence of life, and that it is rendered possible by an empty space between the cranium and the brain.

In light of this we see why the yogis regarded the breath with amazement and awe, considering it to be a key to higher states of consciousness. In modern times it has been demonstrated that every cell of the body is affected by the breath, that the entire body expands and contracts in a virtually imperceptible manner in time with inhalation and exhalation. The breath, then, is a major factor in the physical, mental and spiritual alchemy of yoga.

Joining Om to the breath

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (*Chandogya Upanishad* 1.1.6). The breath and Om arise from the very root of our being, the spirit. Joining Om to the breath extends its transforming vibrations throughout the entire range of our being. It also unites the
different aspects of our being and begins more effectively and rapidly evolving us, returning us to the Source, but now transformed.

“The breath is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3). We join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels it is always producing the sound of Om. The spirit-Self *breathes* Om. So by consciously joining Om to our breathing we link up with our spirit-consciousness and enter into it. Further, when the habit of intoning Om with the breath is established, the simple act of breathing will cue the mind to maintain the intonations.

In all relative beings the prana-breath has become corrupted and confused, binding the spirit rather than freeing it. The prana-breath has gotten out of phase, out of tune or off key and out of alignment with Om, the original keynote of the universe. By intoning Om in time with his breath, the Om yogi takes charge of his prana-breath, realigns and repolarizes it, restoring it to its original form and function. In this way he sets himself squarely in the upward-moving stream of evolution and accelerates his movement within it.

Again: we breathe through the nose, not the mouth. And since meditation is much easier when your nasal passages are open and clear, whenever they are stopped or stuffy, clear them by use of a NeilMed Neti Pot or NeilMed Sinus Rinse bottle, or similar devices. Some nasal inhalers also help clear the nasal passages. If for some reason your nose stays stopped or stuffy, then accept it and do your best. The benefit will still be great.

**Pranayama**

Within the yogic system the breath is considered an actual body within the material body. It is called the *pranamaya kosha*, the body formed of breath or prana. And working with it is known as *pranayama*. Pranayama can mean restraint of prana, and it can also mean control [yama] of the breath, but *ayama* also means length, expansion, and extension. Thus pranayama can also mean the lengthening, expansion,
and extension of the breath as occurs spontaneously in Om meditation. For Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra 2:50 says that pranayama is “external, internal or suppressed modification [of breath], and it becomes measured or regulated [paridrishto], prolonged [dirgha] and subtle or attenuated [sukshmah].” Sutra 51 says: “That pranayama which goes beyond the sphere of internal and external is the fourth,” that which directly relates to turiya or pure consciousness, beyond the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. Also, internal and external can refer either to: 1) inhaling and exhaling, 2) the outer breath accompanied by movement of the lungs, or 3) the internal movement of the subtle prana or breath that has no outer manifestation. It is our steady attention to the breath that is the practice of pranayama. For Shankara says: “Pranayama is caused by a mental activity deriving from a restraining effort inherent in the Self.”

Vyasa says that during meditation the breath becomes, “prolonged and light [fine or subtle].” In time a meditator becomes aware that there is an internal breath that is the support and stimulus of the bodily breathing. Behind that breath is an even subtler force, and so on back to utter stillness at the core of his being. It is the experiencing of all such subtle forms of breath that is pranayama. Through meditation we effect the inner pranayama and achieve the inner breathlessness that is a state of pure awareness.

There is more to this pranayama: “From that [pranayama] is dissolved the covering of light” (Yoga Sutras 2:52). The inner pranayama dissolves the veil which covers the light of the knowledge of the Self. Yet this veil is itself light, the light of subtle matter or energy, the substance of which the most subtle bodies are formed. They are the light that veils the ultimate Light. “The covering of light referred to in this sutra is obviously not used in reference to the light of the soul, but to the light or luminosity associated with the subtler vehicles associated with and interpenetrating the physical vehicle,” according to Taimni in The Science of Yoga.
Vyasa expands on this, saying: “It [pranayama] destroys the karma which covers up the light of knowledge in the yogi. As it is declared: ‘When the ever-shining [Self] is covered over by the net of great illusion, one is impelled to what is not to be done.’ By the power of pranayama, the light-veiling karma binding him to the world becomes powerless, and moment by moment is destroyed. So it has been said [in The Laws of Manu 6:70, 72]: ‘There is no tapas higher than pranayama; from it come purification from taints and the light of knowledge [of the Self].’” Subtle pranayama, then, is the direct way to dissolve karma and be free, for “it is karma by which the light is covered,” says Shankara. And both he and Vyasa explain to us that karma not only binds us to material experience, it also impels us to create even more karma and therefore more bondage in a self-perpetuating circle. But by yoga the karma “becomes powerless, and moment by moment is destroyed.” That is, the karmic seeds are roasted and rendered incapable of creating future experience or births and are ultimately completely annihilated. The more we meditate, the more karma is dissolved.

In a conversation regarding his instructions on breath observation given in the book Maha Yoga, Sri Ramana Maharshi remarked: “Pranayama is of two kinds: one of controlling and regulating the breath and the other of simply watching the breath.” The purpose of working with the breath is simple: “From that comes the dissolving of the covering of light and the fitting of the mind for meditation” (Yoga Sutras 52 and 53). When by this process the breath is refined, so also is the mind; and eventually so is the nervous system and the entire body. Since the body is a vehicle of the mind, this is a very important effect.

But the breath does not accomplish this on its own. It must be joined to intonations of Om. “Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6). “Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om with the experience of its meaning, when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:78). In the light of this
quotation from the Yoga Vashishtha, we see that by joining the repetition of Om to the breath the Om Yogi causes pranayama to go on perpetually throughout the day as well as in meditation.

**Subtle sound**

As we go deeper in meditation our perceptions of the inner sound of our mental intonations of Om become increasingly subtle. At first they may be more like ordinary sung speech, but they will progress to become more and more soft until they become a kind of whispering and in time can be actually silent, a kind of silent movement, very much like when we silently mouth words instead of speaking them aloud.

When we intone in a most subtle, virtually whispered, or silent, way we still think of Om as being intoned, and mentally *intend* to intone, even if we do not inwardly hear or sense the difference. And our intonations, however subtle, should never be weak or tenuous.

It is important to let your intonations of Om change as they will. They may naturally and spontaneously move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective. As a rule the gentle or whispered or silent form of intonation is more effective than ordinary mental intonation, as you will experience for yourself.

**The voice in the silence**

Meditation on Om is the true way to enter into silence. Meditation is such a simple practice because the mind must be made simple to reflect the simple (i.e., unitary) God. The mind must be made blind, deaf, and mute in the inner silence. This is a great secret: we cannot attain to silence by mere absence of words or thoughts. Instead, we must find the silence that lies at the heart of Om. This is a great mystery. Only he who is adept in meditation is truly keeping silence.

“And Elijah arose, and went unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him,…Go forth, and stand
upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (I Kings 19:8-12).

Wind, earthquake, and fire: but God was not in them. Then there was silence, yet in the silence there was a voice. “A still small voice” means that silent (still) subtle (small) impulse which is the very root of all words and therefore Word itself. The New King James Version gives it as “a delicate whispering voice.” The Greek Septuagint has “the voice of a gentle breeze,” evidently keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit is the Breath of God and often manifests as wind. The Slavonic text renders it “the wafting of a gentle light.” This, too, is appropriate, for the Holy Spirit is also Light. Actually, it cannot be at all expressed in human terms, for it is far beyond the senses and ordinary experience. But however it might be described, it is the voice of God coming through the pure spirit that is our true essence.

“Still small voice” refers to the subtle sound of Om experienced in deep meditation. It may even be translated “a silent sound,” for in deepest meditation the intonations of Om become whisper-like and even silent while yet remaining in their integrity. That is, they do not stop, but remain in a form that is perfectly silent and still, more like a soundless mouthing of the Word as already said. The subtle intonations of Om may even become more like a silent act of will or ideation (conceptualization) of the repetition of Om.

In Hebrew, “still, small voice” is demamah dakh kole. Demamah means quiet. It comes from damam which means “fade away.” Dakh means extremely small in the sense of something extremely subtle, and it also means something that actually makes a thing small or subtle: in this case our consciousness. Kole means both voice and sound, and interestingly has the connotation of singing or intoning.
As a rule the gentle or whispered or silent form of intonation is more effective than ordinary mental intonation. The Pranavic stream can become as light and subtle as the movement of air produced by the wings of a butterfly. This is a mystery, but you will experience it for yourself.

Even in daily japa, we should keep our awareness deep in the subtle sound of Om. The breath is necessary to lead us into the depths of the sound, which is why we join our intoning of Om to it.

**Simplicity and subtlety of practice**

The simpler and more easeful the yoga practice, the more deeply effective it is. This is a universal principle in the realm of inner development and experience. How is this? In the inner world of meditation things are often just the opposite to the way they are in the outer world. Whereas in the outer world a strong, aggressive force is most effective in producing a change, in the inner world it is subtle, almost minimal force or movement that is most effectual, even supremely powerful. Those familiar with homeopathic medicine will understand the concept that the more subtle an element is, the more potentially effective it is. In meditation and japa the lightest touch is usually the most efficient.

An incident that took place during one of the crusades illustrates this. At a meeting between the leaders of the European forces and Saladin, commander of the Arab armies, one of the Europeans tried to impress and intimidate Saladin by having one of his soldiers cleave a heavy wooden chair in half with a single downstroke of his broadsword. In response, Saladin ordered someone to toss a silk scarf as light and delicate as a spider’s web into the air. As it descended, he simply held his scimitar beneath it with the sharp edge upward. When the scarf touched the edge, it sheared in half and fell on either side of the blade without even a whisper as he held it completely still. Such is the power of the subtle and the simple. This being so, the simple, subtle intonations of Om are the strongest and most effective form of mantric invocation.
It is important, then, to keep in mind that often when things seem stuck in meditation and not moving as they should, or when the mind does not calm down, it is often because we are not relaxed sufficiently and are not allowing our inner intonations of Om to become as subtle as they should be.

I do not mean to give you the impression that your inner intonations of Om should become feeble or weak in the sense of becoming tenuous, only barely within your mental grasp, and liable to slip away and leave you blank. Not at all. The inner sound of the intonations may become subtler and subtler, but they do not at all become weaker, only gentler and more profound.

**Making the two into one**

We are speaking of “the breath and Om,” but in reality they are the same thing. The breath is not just a stop and go light, used merely to let us know when to intone Om. The breath is a form, a manifestation, of Om. So are all things, but the breath is the closest to pure Om since it takes its existence directly from Om without any intermediate phase. In Om Yoga we intone Om in time with the breath so the two will remerge and become one, restoring their eternal unity.

It is important that the breath and Om be perfectly integrated. That is why the intonation of Om should begin with the breath movement, whether inhalation or exhalation, and end with its cessation. We need not exaggerate this and turn our meditation into a torment of anxiety, but reasonable care should be taken.

**Lalla Yogeshwari on the Omkar Breath**

Lalla Yogeshwari sang: “He who has recognized the Brahmarandhra as the shrine of the divine Self, he who has known the anahata [Om] borne upon the breath: his vain imaginings of themselves have fled far away, and he himself [recognizes] himself as a deva [god]. To whom else, therefore, should he offer worship?” (Lalla Vakyani 33). This covers a
tremendous amount of ground in a very few words: the Sahasrara is the natural abode of the Self which is divine, and the dispelling of ignorance and the arising of Self-knowledge through Om takes place both in and out of meditation.

Then she continues: “He within whom steadfastly proceedeth in its upward course the Syllable Om, and naught but it, and for whom the breath forms a bridge to the Brahmarandhra, he bears in his mind the one and only mantra, and of what benefit to him are a thousand mantras?” (Lalla Vakyani 34). In this way she affirms the necessity of the rising of Om and the breath into the thousand-petalled lotus of the head and to the brahmarandhra, “the gate to God [Brahman].” Because of this she insists that Om is “the one and only mantra” for meditation, and says that a thousand mantras are of no benefit to him who knows to invoke Om, the word that is God, through japa and meditation.

Finally, she says: “I locked the doors and windows of my body. I seized the the thief of my vital airs [prana], and controlled my breath. I bound him tightly in the closet of my heart, and with the whip of the Pranava did I flay him” (Lalla Vakyani 101). The thief of our vital force, which includes the breath, is distraction and ignorance. Through Om we either discipline and bring under control the elements that can be corrected or expel those that cannot be corrected.

So to Lalla the combination of breath and Om was the path to salvation (moksha).

**True spiritual experience**

Our intention in meditating is to center our awareness permanently in the consciousness of who we really are, in the spirit whose nature is itself pure consciousness. We center or merge our awareness in the breath and Om because they arise directly from the Atman and will lead us into the consciousness which is the Self.

The yogi’s fervent aspiration is to experience the Real, the Truly Existent (Sat) which we call Brahman, the Paramatman. So immediately
he is confronted with the crucial question: What is true spiritual experience? This must be answered lest he wander in this and future lifetimes through delusional experiences he mistakes for realities. Since yoga deals with the mind, the major source of illusory experience, the yogi is very susceptible to mistaking the unreal for the real, just as he was before becoming a yogi. The masters of yoga have given us clear information as to the nature of real spiritual experience.

When Gorakhnath asked Matsyendranath: “What is the abode of knowledge [jnana]?” the Master replied: “Consciousness [chetana] is the abode of knowledge” (Gorakh Bodha 21, 22). Shankara defines correct meditation as “meditation established in the perception of the nature of Spirit alone, pure consciousness itself.” Yoga Sutra 3:55 tells us: “Liberation is attained when the mind is the same as the spirit in purity.” That is, when through meditation we are permanently filled with nothing but the awareness of pure consciousness, liberation is attained. “That is the liberation of the spirit when the spirit stands alone in its true nature as pure light. So it is.” This is the conclusion of Vyasa. True spiritual experience, then, is the experience of pure, unalloyed consciousness that is the nature of spirit and Spirit, of the individual and the cosmic Self. Sri Ramana Maharshi said: “The Ekakshara [Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self.” And: “Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self.”

**Non-dual consciousness**

True spiritual experience is the non-dual experience of Spirit. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says: “When there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one knows another. But when everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through
what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one know That owing to which all this is known—through what should one know the Knower?” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2:4:14). The Chandogya Upanishad tells us: “Where one sees nothing but the One, hears nothing but the One, knows nothing but the One—there is the Infinite. Where one sees another, hears another, knows another—there is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite is mortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 24:1).

The Atman-Self is never anything but consciousness, yet it, like God, has extended itself outward as the many levels of our present state of being. Unlike God, we have lost control over just about everything, and by becoming absorbed in experience of our external being have caused it to take on a virtually independent existence, dragging us along with it. Conversely, by keeping ourselves centered in pure awareness, the witnessing consciousness that is our real Self, we will begin the process of turning all those levels back into pure spirit. Yoga is the fundamental clearing of our consciousness.

**The solar path of liberation**

“The sun is verily Life…. That very one rises up who is Life, who is identified with all creatures, and who is possessed of all forms. This very one, that has been referred to, is spoken of by the mantra: “The realizers of Brahman knew the one that is possessed of all forms, full of rays, endowed with illumination, the resort of all, the single light (of all), and the radiator of heat. It is the sun that rises—the sun that possesses a thousand rays, exists in a hundred forms and is the life of all creatures” (Prashna Upanishad 1:5, 7, 8).

All plant, animal, and human life on this planet depend upon the sun. It is the subtle powers of sunlight which stimulate growth and evolution. Sunlight particularly stimulates the activity of the higher centers in the brain, especially that of the pineal gland. Even in the depths of the
earth sensitive people can tell when the sun rises and sets above them. The sun truly awakens us in the deepest sense. As the germinating seed struggles upward toward the sun and out into its life-giving rays, so all higher forms of life reach out for the sun, which acts as a metaphysical magnet, drawing them upward and outward toward ever-expanding consciousness. Sunlight is the radiant form of Om, so the sun initiates the entire solar system into Om. Human beings are solar creatures, therefore to intone Om is natural to them.

When the individual comes into manifestation on this earth he passes from the astral world into the material plane by means of the sun, which is a mass of exploding astral energies, not mere flaming gases. And when the individual has completed his course of evolution within this plane, upon the death of his body he rises upward in his subtle body and passes through the sun into the higher worlds, there to evolve even higher or to pass directly into the depths of the transcendent Brahman.

To ensure that this will take place, the Om Yogi practices the japa and meditation of Om, for the Chandogya Upanishad tells us that Om and the sun are identical in essence, “for the sun is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1) That is, the energy of the sun is a manifestation of Om. Scientists have only recently discovered this phenomenon. On page 16 of the July 2004 issue of National Geographic we find this: “Bubbles the size of Texas cover the sun’s face…. Called granules, the short-lived cells of plasma carry heat to the surface through convection, the same way water boils in a pot. The rise and fall of granules creates sound waves, which cause the sun to throb like a drum every five minutes.”

Om yogis intone Om in time with their breath because the solar energies and the breath are intimately connected, for the upanishad further tells us that “the breath is continually sounding ‘Om”’ (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3).

The Taittiriya Upanishad says: “He who is the Self in man, and he who is the Self in the sun, are one. Verily, he who knows this truth
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overcomes the world; he transcends the physical sheath, he transcends the vital sheath, he transcends the mental sheath, he transcends the intellectual sheath, he transcends the sheath of the ego....He who is the Self in man, and he who is the Self in the sun, are one” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:8:1; 3.10.4).

Our life depends on the light of the sun, so it is also a manifestation of the power of Om. The japa and meditation of Om aligns us with the solar powers that are Om and thereby greatly increase our life force and the evolution of all the levels of our being.

Om Yoga prepares us for the Great Departure. As the Chandogya Upanishad also says: “Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun. …When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2, 5).

The solar rays do not just flow into this world, they also draw upward through the sun and beyond. In the human body the process of exhalation and inhalation is related to solar energy, and much of the solar power on which we subsist is drawn into the body through our breathing. This is why Giri Bala (see Autobiography of a Yogi, Chapter Forty-Six) employed a special form of breathing to live without eating. The solar rays do not just strike the surface of our body, but penetrate into the nadis, the channels in the astral and causal bodies that correspond to physical nerves. Just as electrical impulses flow through the physical nerves, the subtle solar life force, the prana, flows through the subtle nadis and keeps us alive and functioning. And as we have already seen (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3), the breath as it flows is always sounding Om. The breath, then, is a vehicle for the solar energies that produce
evolution, and we increase its effect through the japa and meditation of Om.

The continual intonation of Om, both in and outside of meditation, conditions our subtle levels so that at the time of death we will be oriented toward the solar powers and can ascend upon them if we continue our intonations of Om even after the body has been dropped. Those intonations will guarantee our ascent into the solar world. Those who have imbued themselves with the Pranavic vibrations will enter through the solar gate, whereas those who have not done so will be shut out by it and compelled to return to earthly rebirth.

“At the time of departure from this world, remember Om, the Lord, the Protector” (Yajur Veda 40:15). Whatever we think of most during life we will think of at the time of our death. This is affirmed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (8:5-10): “At the time of death he who remembers me while giving up the body attains my Being–of this there is no doubt. Moreover, whatever he fixes his mind on when he gives up the body at the end, to that he goes [that he attains]. Always he becomes that [is transformed into that]. Therefore at all times remember me, with your mind [manas] and intellect [buddhi] fixed on me. Thus without doubt you shall come to me. With mind made steadfast by yoga, which turns not to anything else, to the Divine Supreme Spirit he goes, meditating on him. He who meditates on the Seer, the Ancient, the Ruler, subtler than the atom, Support of all, whose form is inconceivable and radiant like the sun and beyond darkness, at the time of death with mind unmoving, endowed with devotion and yoga power, he goes to the Divine Supreme Spirit.” And the Prashna Upanishad (5:5,7): “If he meditates on the Supreme Being with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the light of the sun, he is led to the world of Brahman Who is higher than the highest life, That which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme.”

Those who continually invoke and meditate upon Om during their lifetime will remember Om at the time of death, and by means of Om will ascend to the sun and beyond into the real Beyond.
The earth also intones Om

Not so many years ago, seismologists discovered that the earth emits oscillations that sound like “the ringing of a gigantic bell,” which is exactly how the yogis have said Om manifests as the Anahata Shabda within the body in the region of the heart. Researchers say that this vibration creates “waves” on the planet’s surface in both up-down and forward-backward motions. In other words, our world is breathing: inhaling and exhaling—and intoning Om, just as do we. So what could be more natural than the practice of Om Yoga?

Yoga Nidra—conscious sleep

The purpose of meditation is the development of deep inner awareness. The Yoga Vashishtha (5:78), a classical treatise on yoga, speaks of the state “when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state” known in Sanskrit as sushupti. The sage Sandilya in his treatise on yoga, the Sandilya Upanishad, also speaks of “the right realization of the true nature of the sound which is at the extreme end of the pronunciation of the Syllable Om, when sushupti is rightly cognized [experienced] while conscious.” Ramana Maharshi also spoke frequently of this yogic state known as yoga nidra: yoga sleep. Although it is described as dreamless sleep, it is much, much more, for there is a deepening of consciousness in this state that does not occur in ordinary dreamless sleep.

In deep meditation we enter into the silent witness state, experiencing the state of dreamless sleep while fully conscious and aware. When approaching this state the beginner may actually fall asleep. This is not to be worried about, for such is quite natural, and after a while will not occur. From birth we have been habituated to falling asleep when the mind reaches a certain inner point. Now through meditation we will take another turn into the state of deep inner awareness. Ramana Maharshi said that even if a yogi falls asleep while approaching, or in, yoga nidra, the process of meditation still continues. Yoga nidra is the state of conscious sushupti, dreamless sleep, and yet much more, for
then the awareness is gathered into the Chidakasha, the principle of pure consciousness. And there is a deepening of consciousness that does not occur in any other state.

So when you have this “asleep while awake” state occur, know that you are on the right track when it is imageless and thoughtless except for your intonations of Om (for those should never stop). Not that visions cannot occur during meditation, but it is easy to mistake dreams for visions. Therefore it is wise to value only the conscious sushupti experience in meditation, within which Om continues to be the focus of our awareness. This is the true samadhi.

The workings of Om

But there is another, seemingly contradictory, side to this. *Yogasch chitta-vritti-nirodhah* (Yoga Sutras 1:2). Patanjali here defines yoga as the stopping (*nirodha*) of the modifications (*vritti*) of the mind (*chitta*). Superficially considered, this seems to mean merely being blank, without thoughts. But if this were so, dreamless sleep would be yoga, and the more we slept the more enlightened we would become! Still, most yogis tend to think that in meditation no thoughts or impressions should arise, that if they do, the meditation is imperfect and reduced in value. But Om is a transforming-transmuting force, and that implies change, and change is a process. So sometimes you will simply sit in the happy and peaceful silence of pure yoga nidra, intent on the sound of your subtle intonations of Om, and at other times things will definitely be going on. Both are equally beneficial, for Om knows what it is doing, and both may occur in the same meditation.

Meditation, then, is not just sinking down into silence and stasis, though that does happen in some meditation periods, but can be an extremely active state. As you meditate, on the subtle levels you may see, hear, feel, and be aware of a great many things: thoughts, visual impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike. All of this is evoked by your practice, and nothing will be a distraction if you simply
observe it in a calm and objective manner, keeping your awareness on
the breath and intoning Om in time with it. Your interest should be in
your intonations of Om, yet you should be aware of what is going on.
The key is to remain a calm observer.

The process of meditation takes place within the spirit-Self. At the
day of life, having prepared ourselves by this practice, we shall ascend
from the body into the realm of immortality. “At all times remember
me, and fight with your mind [manas] and intellect [buddhi] fixed on
me. Thus without doubt you shall come to me” (Bhagavad Gita (8:8).

Spending hours in and out of meditation invoking Om constantly
produces the most profound changes in the meditator’s psychic energy
system on the physical, astral, and causal levels. The union of the prana
(breath) and the subtle vibrations of Om produce dramatic repolarization
of the consciousness and life force. Sensitive yogis will experience this
along with a myriad other transformations.

The elements of Om Yoga meditation

As we have already seen, there are two components of Om Yoga
meditation: Khechari Mudra and Om Japa-Pranayama. If during med-
itation we feel unsure as to whether things are going right, we need only
check to see if these things are being done and our attention is centered
in them. If so, all is well. If not, it is a simple matter to return to them
and make everything right.

Of these elements, listening is the key to success in meditation.
That is because if we center our attention in listening to the mental
sound of Om as we intone it, we become totally receptive to the
effects of Om and also cut off distractions, mostly by making ourselves
indifferent to them. Nearly every time that I just don’t feel right in
meditation or it seems that things are not going as they should, the
moment I remember to be focused on listening to (inwardly hear-
ing) my inner intonations of Om, everything straightens out and
moves onward.
It is essential that we be centered in the etheric levels of our being, and this is done by intoning Om and listening to those intonations. This is the Golden Rule of Om meditation. During meditation, whatever happens, whatever comes or goes, relax and keep *listening* to your inner intonations of Om. It is the sound of Om that accomplishes everything. And by listening to it you become totally receptive and responsive to it so it can work its transforming purpose to the maximum degree.

Success in Om Yoga consists of going deeper and deeper into the subtle sound of the Om mantra as we sound it within. It is the thread leading us into the center of Reality.

**Prayer**

It is traditional for some brief prayer to be made before and after meditation. Usually before meditation a simple prayer is made asking divine blessing and guidance. Then at the end another brief prayer is made giving thanks, offering the meditation to God, and asking divine blessing for the rest of the day. There is no set form, just words from the heart. This is not essential for Om Yoga practice, but those who are so inclined may find it beneficial.

**Throughout the day: japa**

Meditation is most effective, but its effects need to be sustained throughout the day by continuing to intone Om in an easy and relaxed manner in time with the breath. This should be without any strain, just as you do in meditation. That is, Om should be intoned *constantly*, throughout all activities, without break or interruption. Naturally this is difficult, even impossible to do, in the beginning, nevertheless it *is* possible in time. Immediately upon awakening in the morning the mental intonations of Om should begin and should be maintained even after going to bed until falling asleep. Not only does this deepen your consciousness, it also enables you to obtain much more benefit from your sleep, and the intonation of Om can occur even in sleep.
When you lie down to sleep or rest, lie flat on your back with your arms at your side, palms downward, and your legs out straight but relaxed, in the so-called Corpse Pose (Savasana). The feet need not be held straight up. You can also place your arms and hands in another position if you prefer. If you find that lying on your back is not conducive to sleep, then lie in any position in which you can be comfortable. Relax completely, with closed eyes. Do Om Japa-Pranayama until you fall asleep. If you awaken during the sleep period, resume the japa until you fall sleep again. This practice is also helpful when you are ill, as it can aid the healing process.

In time you can be intoning Om even while speaking to others.

**Japa and meditation of Om**

Japa and meditation of Om support each other. Continual japa of Om during your daily routine will increase the effectiveness of your practice of meditation, and daily meditation practice will deepen the effect of your japa outside meditation. By the two wings of japa and meditation we ascend through Om to the Highest that is Om.

Commenting on the Yoga Sutras, Vyasa tells the Om yogi: “It has been said: ‘After Om japa, let him set himself in meditation, after meditation, let him set himself to japa. When Om japa and meditation come to perfection the Supreme Self [Paramatman] shines forth.’” And Shankara, commenting on Vyasa’s commentary, says: “Meditation is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It. Yogi’s who are engaged in both japa and meditation attain one-pointedness of mind. After japa, which causes his mind to bow before the Lord, let him engage in meditation. When his mind becomes unwavering from meditation on the Lord, let him do japa of Om, for japa leads to meditation. When japa and meditation of Om come to perfection then the Supreme Lord [Parameshwara], the Supreme Self [Paramatman] Who stands in the highest place, shines forth for the yogi.”
When doing japa as we are engaged in other activities there is a profound effect, but we are not able to experience the effects of Om nearly as much as we can while sitting in meditation. The meditation experience is absolutely essential for spiritual progress, just as japa is essential to ensure that meditation will be effective to the maximum degree.

Meditation and japa, sitting still and moving about, are to become the same thing: absorption in the inner Om.

**In conclusion**

“When you utter ‘Om’ it travels not only all around the earth but throughout all space and eternity”—so said Paramhansa Yogananda. Thoughts do not cease the moment they pass from the conscious mind. They spread out around us, into our aura, the subtle field of biomagnetic and mental energies around our physical body, and then on into the surrounding creation, ultimately extending to the farthest reaches of the cosmos and then returning and striking back into our aura and mind. This is the process of mental karma. By continually doing repetition and meditation of Om, we set up a continuous current of spiritual vibration that in time becomes a perpetual inflow of higher consciousness as it returns to us after having extended throughout creation and benefited all things and all beings therein. In this way we create the highest form of spiritual karma, uplifting and divinizing both ourselves and all that exists.

Furthermore, every thought is a wave or whorl that keeps vibrating in the very substance of our mind (chitta) and even into future lives, depending on how strong they were and how often they were repeated. Om, then, imbues us with its divine light and power, counteracting the past habit of negative, foolish, or idle thoughts.

Om is the Thought, the Word, of God that through constant intonation enables the yogi to know his Self as God. “Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).
Therefore, throughout the day and night, whatever you are doing or whenever at rest, continually intone Om mentally in time with the breath and center your awareness in the mental sound. Since there is no time when you do not breathe, this is really not difficult with some practice.
Chapter Seven:

Points for Successful Meditation

Be at peace and confident

Be very relaxed about your involvement with Om and with all your spiritual disciplines. The moment anxiety enters, so does the ego and things are greatly hindered and even reversed. Just do as you do. Do not be careless or causal, but be careful and relaxed, confident in the blessing of God whose consciousness is embodied in the sacred Om. It is better to do effective intonations of Om rather than just stacking up a lot of nervous, artificial intonations.

You are yourself a part of God; nothing can change that. Have no fear or anxiety. Trust in God who will always be looking after you. And stay in tune with him by the constant japa of Om and the practice of regular meditation so he can silently guide you through your intuition. Live in God and be at peace and in joy.

Immortal and eternal

We are immortal. How do we know that? It is intuited by anyone with an unclouded awareness. For as long as the human race has existed on this earth, our immortality has been part of common knowledge based on intuition and also by various experiences people have had throughout

108
Points for Successful Meditation

history: near-death experience, actual dying and returning to life, and seeing or receiving communication from departed persons in both the waking and sleeping states. Some of those who have experienced the phenomenon of astral travel have entered the worlds of the departed, observed and spoken with them, and returned to tell about it.

But we are more than immortal. We are eternal. That is, we will not just live forever from this point on, we have also existed forever, from eternity. Eternity is not time without end, but that state of being or existence which transcends this realm of time and space. In eternity neither beginning nor end is possible; it is the state of Divine Being, of God, of whom it was long ago said in the Rig Veda: “His shadow is immortality.”

How is it possible for us to be eternal? Because our very existence is rooted in the eternity of God. We have always existed within God because in some ineffable way we are part of God, one with him yet distinct from him. It is like the ocean and its waves: the waves are not the ocean, but the ocean is the waves. Eternally we have been the parts and God has been the Whole. We are never separate from him, but we are always distinct from him. We are all spirit, but we are finite and God is infinite. God lives in us and we live in God. We are divine; we are gods within God.

Meditation: the key

We must know this, not just believe it. How can we know this? We can know it through practice of the spiritual science of meditation. Like mathematics, this science is based on the fundamental nature of relative existence in which we presently find ourselves for the purpose of the evolution of our consciousness. To understand this we need to know a bit of cosmic history.

The seed of life

Within eternity, within the depths of Spirit, there arises an impulse—or rather the potential of an impulse—which then like a germinating seed
expands into a field of subtle energy possessing the two fundamental qualities of movement and sound. Moving outward into increasingly objective forms of these two forces, the living universe takes shape, functions, and eventually comes into fruition when it has so perfectly evolved that it returns to its original state of unmanifested perfection. During this cycle of projection and withdrawal the spirits, the seeds of consciousness that have been cast into this field by the Sower-Creator, also evolve to the point of return into Eternal Being. For the cosmos is a great school of consciousness in which the spirits learn to truly be gods within God, manifesting their eternal potential.

Taking charge

The first stages of this drama occur solely under the aegis of the Divine Director. But in time a point is reached in which each of the actors on the cosmic stage begins to direct his own drama and elaborate it to such a degree that they can return to their Source with the capacity to experience and share in the Infinity that is native only to God. They do not become God, but they become godlike in the fullest extent. To attain this they take charge of their own evolution by the practice of Yoga.

The basis of yoga

Yoga is based on the fundamental nature of relative existence: the dynamic field of the single evolutionary force or impulse manifesting as movement and sound. All the phenomena of the universe are but variations, evolutes, of these two aspects of the one impulse which is the basis of the duality which makes both the universe and evolution within it possible, and the perfected unity which is its final purpose.

In the individual human being the root-impulse manifests as breath and the subtle sound vibration produced by inhalation and exhalation. This is the force that impels the individual spirit into the realm of evolution and then produces the evolution itself, and by conscious cultivation
of which the awakened individual can continue his own evolution to its ultimate perfection: revealed godhood.

Long ago in the hidden mists of earth’s history this secret of Yoga was revealed to those developed enough to perceive it within the depths of their own being. Discovering the way to transcendence, they seized it and applied it. Consciously entering into the stream of divine evolution, they became in the truest sense Ascended Masters, no longer gods in potential but in actuality. They passed on their knowledge of Yoga to others who in turn passed it on to succeeding generations, even unto today. Since it works with the yogi’s fundamental makeup and nature, there is no need for any external empowerment such as “initiation.” The only thing needed is practice.

The essence of yoga

Yoga consists of a single process that takes place in two modes: within meditation and outside meditation. It also has two elements, just as does the universe of which we are a living, evolving part. The first is awareness of breath, and the second is the production of mental sound which links breath awareness to the subtle sound produced spontaneously by the breath. This subtle sound is Om, “the word that is God” (Bhagavad Gita 7:8). Both the inhaling breath and the exhaling breath make the subtle sound of Om. Though two, they are really one, and Om makes two into one, changing duality into unity on all levels of manifestation. Om leads us into duality for our evolution and then leads us back into unity as the final step in our evolution. The simple yet profound practice of Om Yoga, of Om japa and meditation, will be found to correct, heal and restore all the levels of our existence, physical, mental and spiritual.

Spiritual study

The swadhyaya (self-study) prescribed by Patanjali includes spiritual reading. I will never cease to bless the day I first read the Bhagavad Gita. The wise yogi reads the Gita daily and ponders its truths. The more he
does so, the more he will understand as his mind is being continually purified and enlightened through daily meditation. Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahasaya required all his disciples to read the Gita each day of their life. The entire scripture is directed to the yogi, so all seven hundred verses speak to him. Without the principles found in the Gita I could never have persevered as a yogi. It is essential reading for those who want to persevere as a yogi and avoid the pitfalls of external life.

The Bhagavad Gita is a kind of digest of the eleven principal upanishads, so it is good to read them as well, though nothing can substitute for daily Gita study, which should be made the yogi’s lifetime companion and guide.


Two other books that will help you tremendously are *Meditation and Spiritual Life* by Swami Yatiswarananda, and *The Philosophy of Gorakshnath* by Akshaya Kumar Banerjea. For help in understanding technical Sanskrit terms, I recommend *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary*.

All five of these books can be obtained from amazon.com.

**Responsiveness to yoga practice**

We cannot lessen the innate effectiveness of Om Yoga, but we can certainly lessen or even prevent our responsiveness to it and the effect it will have on us. The bodies, physical, astral, and causal, are the vehicles through which the individual evolves during the span of life on earth, and must be taken into serious account by the yogi who will discover that they can exert a powerful, controlling effect on the mind. If wax and clay are cold they cannot be molded, nor will they take any impression. If molasses is cold it will hardly pour. It is all a matter of responsiveness. Only when warm are these substances malleable. In the same way, unless our inner and outer bodies are made responsive or reactive
Points for Successful Meditation

to the japa and meditation of Om we will miss many of the beneficial
effects. Hence we should do everything we can to increase our response
levels, to ensure that our physical and psychic bodies are moving at the
highest possible rate of vibration and are functioning in harmony at
the maximum level, and with perfect polarity and interaction between
them. Diet and spiritual discipline, especially the observance of the yogic
principles known as yama and niyama (which will be discussed later),
are essential to successful yoga practice.

Yogic diet

A fundamental key to success in yoga is diet. For just as the physical
substance of the food becomes assimilated into our physical body, the
subtler energies become united to our inner levels, including our mind.
The observant meditator will discover that the diet of the physical body
is also the diet of the mind, that whatever is eaten physically will have
an effect mentally. Here are some statements about the nature and effect
of food that are found in the Upanishads.

“From food has arisen strength [virya], austerity [tapasya], mantra,
action, and the world itself” (Prashna Upanishad 6.4). Ascetic discipline
(tapasya), mantra and right action are essential to the yogi, and here we
see that the food we eat is their basis. Obviously the kind of food we
eat will determine the quality of all those things.

“By food, indeed, do all the breaths [pranás, life forces] become great”
(Taittiriya Upanishad 1.5.4). As we eat food, we become aware of
the in-body life forces.

“Man, verily consists of the essence of food” (Taittiriya Upanishad
2.1.1). So we are what we eat.

“From food, verily, are produced all creatures—whatsoever dwell on
earth. By food alone, furthermore, do they live….From food all crea-
tures are born: by food, when born, they grow….Verily, different from
this, which consists of the essence of food, but within it, is another self,
which consists of the vital breath [prana]. By this the former is filled.
This too has the shape of a man. Like the human shape of the former
is the human shape of the latter” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.2.1). The spiritual, astral body is drawn exclusively from food, so diet is crucial in spiritual development.

“Food when eaten becomes threefold. What is coarsest in it becomes faeces, what is medium becomes flesh and what is subtlest becomes mind. Water when drunk becomes threefold. What is coarsest in it becomes urine, what is medium becomes blood and what is subtlest becomes prana….The mind, my dear, consists of food, [and] the prana of water…” (Chandogya Upanishad 6.5.1, 2, 4).

“That which is the subtlest part of curds rises, when they are churned and becomes butter. In the same manner that which is the subtlest part of the food that is eaten rises and becomes mind. Thus the mind consists of food” (Chandogya Upanishad 6.6.1, 2, 5; the same is confirmed in 6.7.1-6).

“Now is described the discipline for inner purification by which self-knowledge is attained: When the food is pure, the mind becomes pure. When the mind is pure the memory [smriti—memory of our eternal spirit-Self] becomes firm. When the memory is firm all ties are loosened” (Chandogya Upanishad 7.26.2).

“On food rests everything—whatsoever breathes and whatsoever breathes not” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.5.1).

“In the body there are nerves [nadis] called hita, which are placed in the heart. Through these the essence of our food passes as it moves on. Therefore the subtle body receives finer food than the gross body” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.2.3).

Both meditation and diet refine the inner senses so we can produce and perceive the subtle changes that occur during meditation.

Meat is both heavy and toxic, especially from the chemicals spread throughout the tissues from the fear and anger of the animal when it was slaughtered. So our minds will also be heavy and toxic from eating meat as well as poisoned by the vibrations of anger and fear. And then there is the karma of killing sentient beings. Moreover, the instinctual
and behavioral patterns of the animals will become our instinctual and behavioral impulses.

Fruits, vegetables, and grains have no such obstructions. Consequently, our mental energies will be light and malleable, responsive to our spiritual disciplines. Few things are more self-defeating than the eating of meat. From the yogic standpoint, the adoption of a vegetarian diet is a great spiritual boon. By vegetarian I mean abstention from meat, fish, and eggs or anything that contains them to any degree, including animal fats. It is even better to also eliminate all dairy products and their derivatives from the diet.

Our general health also contributes to our proficiency in meditation, so a responsible yogi is very aware of what is beneficial and detrimental to health and orders his life accordingly, especially in eliminating completely all alcohol, nicotine, and mind-altering drugs whether legal or illegal. Caffeine, too, is wisely avoided, and so is sugar.

All of the above-mentioned substances—meat, fish, eggs, animal derivatives, alcohol, nicotine, and mind-altering drugs—deaden and coarsen the mind and body and consequently the consciousness. Thus they prevent the necessary effects and experiences of subtle Om meditation, reducing it to an exercise in relaxation and calmness rather than the means of liberation for which it is solely intended.

The sum of all this is that we must do more than meditate. We must live out our spiritual aspirations by so ordering our lives that we will most quickly advance toward the Goal. This is done by observing Yama and Niyama.

**Yogic Environment**

Recently one of our monks showed me two containers. In each one was a very small, green plant less than an inch high, consisting of two leaves. “I planted these nine weeks ago,” he said. “Really? What is wrong with them?” I asked. “I used the wrong kind of potting soil, so they won’t grow,” he told me. It is exactly the same with the study of
spiritual philosophy and the practice of meditation: if there is not the right environment, inner and outer, nothing at all will come of it. Not only do we need a special place in our home favorable to meditation, our entire environment should be examined to see that it, too, is not mentally and spiritually heavy, toxic, disruptive and agitating. The same is true of our employment and our associates, business, social, and familial.

The most important environment, of course, is the inner one of our own mind: our thoughts. Our dominant thought should be our intonations of Om. Next to that should be continual thoughts of spiritual matters drawn from our own study of spiritual writings, attendance at spiritual discourses, and conversation with spiritually-minded associates. Our minds should naturally move in the highest spiritual planes. This is neither impossible nor impractical, for everything proceeds from and is controlled by the Supreme Consciousness.

**Sitting like Buddha**

When Gautama Buddha sat beneath the bodhi tree he vowed that until he was enlightened he would not get up even if his flesh and bones were to be dissolved. This is why it is said that Buddha got enlightenment because he knew how to sit. His sitting was in the consciousness of the Self, not just the body. So if you sit in the same way during meditation, you will be safe from all distractions and illusions as was Buddha.

All the forces of the cosmos came to distract Buddha from his inner quest. Even cosmic illusion itself in the form of Mara came to distract him. But he did not move, either in body or mind. Such steadfastness conquered the forces of ignorance completely. Buddha conquered them by simply ignoring them—which was the only sensible course, seeing that they were just illusions. You, too, can conquer distractions not by combating them, not by killing them, not by seeing through them or any such thing, but by just having nothing to do with them. The true Self does not touch any of these things, so the path to the true spirit involves not touching them in your mind.
By sitting and ignoring the unreal, Buddha found the Real. Therefore many centuries later Jesus simply said: “In your patience possess your souls” (Luke 21:19). To relax and experience is the key for the correct practice of meditation.

**Hatching the egg**

Each person will experience meditation in a different way, even if there are points of similarity with that of others. Also, meditations can vary greatly for each of us. In some meditations a lot will be going on, and then in other meditations it will seem as though we are just sitting and coasting along with nothing happening. This is exactly as it should be. Some meditations will produce changes and others will be times of quiet assimilation and stabilization.

When nothing seems to be going on at all, we may mistakenly think we are meditating incorrectly or it just does not work. Actually, meditation produces profound and far-reaching changes in our extremely complex makeup, whether we do or do not perceive those changes. Some meditations are times of quiet assimilation of prior changes and balancing out to get ready for more change. If we are meditating in the way outlined, we are doing everything correctly and everything is going on just as it should be, and every breath is further refining our inner faculties of awareness.

Very early in the scale of evolution sentient beings are born from eggs. This includes us human beings. So it is not inappropriate to think of our evolution in such terms. All eggs hatch and develop through heat which is absolutely necessary, just as it is for the germination of seeds (the eggs of plants). Yoga is called tapasya, the generation of heat, for that very reason. Our meditation, then is like the hatching of an egg. Nothing may seem to be going on, but life is developing on the unseen levels.

The hatching of a chicken egg is a prime example. Inside the egg there is nothing but two kinds of goo, the white and the yolk. Both are liquids and have no other perceptible characteristics than color and
slimy texture. The hen does nothing more than sit on the egg and keep it warm, yet as the days pass the goo inside the shell turns into internal organs, blood, bones, skin, feathers, brain, ears, and eyes—all that go to make up a chicken—just by being incubated, by doing “nothing.” At last, a living, conscious being breaks its way out of the shell. No wonder eggs have been used as symbols of resurrection from death into life.

Another apt symbol is the cocoon. The dull-colored, earth-crawling, caterpillar encases itself in a shroud of its own making and becomes totally dormant. Yet, as weeks pass a wondrous transformation takes place internally until one day an utterly different creature emerges: a beautifully colored and graceful butterfly that flies into the sky and thenceforth rarely if ever touches the earth.

The same is true of the persevering yogi and the eventual revelation of his true nature. Through the japa and meditation of Om, simple as they are, the “heat” of the divine vibration causes our full spiritual potential to develop and manifest in us. Tapasya evolves the yogi, turning the goo of his present state into a life beyond present conceptions.

**Training for living**

Meditation is not an end in itself, but rather the means to an end: to the daily living out of the illumined consciousness produced by meditation. We go into meditation so we can come out of meditation more conscious and better equipped to live our life. The change will not be instant, but after a reasonable time we should see a definite effect in how we perceive, think and act. If the meditator does not find that his state of mind during daily activities has been affected by his meditation, then his meditation is without value. This is especially important for us in the West since meditation is continually being touted as a “natural high” or a producer of profound and cataclysmic experiences. Such experiences may sound good on paper or in a metaphysical bragfest, but in time they are seen to be empty of worth on any level, ephemeral dreams without substance. Success in meditation is manifested outside
meditation by the states of mind and depth of insight that become habitual. The proof of its viability is the meditator’s continual state of mind and his apprehension of both reality and Reality.

Many things lighten and purify the mind, but nothing clarifies the mind like the prolonged and profound practice of meditation. The state of mental clarity produced by meditation should continue outside meditation. Meditation should by its nature prepare us for living. At the same time, meditation should establish us in interior life, making us increasingly aware both inwardly and outwardly. This is because reality consists of two aspects: the unmoving consciousness of spirit and the moving, dynamic activity of evolutionary energy. Reality embraces both, and to be without the awareness of one or the other is to be incomplete.

Meditation enables us to see deeply into things outside meditation. Through meditation we cultivate the ability to be objective: separate from objects but keenly aware of them and thus able to intelligently and effectively function in relation to them. Meditation, then, is the most effective school for living open to us. And it manifests in the simplest of ways: a more compassionate outlook, a deeper self-understanding, an awareness of changelessness amidst change, a taste for spiritual conversation and reading, and experience of inmost peace. One man who had been practicing meditation for a while remarked to another meditator, “I can’t figure out what is happening to me. Last night for the first time in my married life I helped my wife do the dishes.”

In the practice of the japa and meditation of Om we are putting ourselves into a totally, even sublimely, different sphere of consciousness and experience from that in which so much phenomena arise. Meditation is done for the development of consciousness, truly pure and simple, whereas it is our active life that is meant for both seeing and experiencing. It is all a matter of consciousness, of consciousness that pervades our entire life, not just a wonderful feeling in meditation. It is the fundamental state of consciousness and mind outside of meditation that matters.
Avoiding the gears

In meditation stay away from the gears of the mind! It is the nature of the mind to dance around producing thoughts, impressions, memories, etc. Therefore we do not at all care what potential distractions may arise during meditation. We ignore them. And if we ignore them they are no longer distractions. So stay with Om—with God—and forget everything else. Then all will be yours.

Never come out of meditation to note or write down something. If the inspiration, insight, or idea is really from your higher Self or from God it will come back to you outside of meditation.

Also, do not engage the mind-gears with long prayers, affirmations, and suchlike during meditation. And do not let the mind entice you with “insight,” “inspiration,” or “knowledge” of any kind. According to Shankara the practice of yoga “has right vision alone for its goal, and glories of knowledge and power are not its purpose.”

Experiences and thoughts in meditation: be indifferent

While meditating, many things, some of them quite dramatic, impressive, and even enjoyable, as well as inane, boring, and uncomfortable, occur as a side-effect. Have no desire to produce or reproduce or avoid any state or experience of any kind, to any degree. Our only interest should be our intonations of Om in time with the breath. What arises… arises. During meditation much revealing and release take place in both the conscious and subconscious minds and sometimes even in the physical body and should always be a passively observed process without involvement in any way.

Thoughts from the subconscious may float or even flood up, but you need only keep on intoning Om in time with the breath. The states of consciousness that meditation produces are the only things that matter, for they alone bring us to the Goal.

Much phenomena can take place during the process of correction and purification that is an integral part of meditation. When the chakras
are being cleansed and perfected, they may become energized, awakened, or opened. In the same way subtle channels in the spine and body may open and subtle energies begin flowing in them. This is all good when it happens spontaneously, effortlessly. But whatever happens in meditation, our sole occupation should be with Om and the breath.

**Uniting with Om**

All that exists is a manifestation of Om, for Om is the essence of all things. Om is perpetually sounding from within the heart (core) of all things, including us. To unite our awareness with that ever-flowing Om through japa and meditation is the true “centering.” Om japa and meditation put us in touch with that inmost stream or current so we can follow it back to its divine source.

Every year in India thousands make pilgrimages to the source of the Ganges and other sacred rivers. Such pilgrimages are externalizations of the pilgrimage of the spirit that is accomplished by tracing the inner river of Om back to its source through meditation. “By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 404). “The sound of the Pranava, Om, originates in the supreme Brahman…. A yogi alone knows that this sound originates from the supreme Brahman.” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 416.)

**Evocation and invocation**

In japa and meditation we are not employing Om as a prayer, an affirmation, or a remembrance, but as effective evocation, a calling forth, of our inherent, eternal Self-consciousness, and as an invocation, a calling into us, of the consciousness that is the Supreme Self. Om brings into our awareness the consciousness of both the individual Self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) in perfect union. The japa and meditation of Om makes us one with our true Self and one with God, merging our being and consciousness with his perfect being
and consciousness. Because this is so, we do not need to keep in mind an intellectual meaning of Om (there is not one, anyway) or cultivate an attitude or emotion during our practice. Rather, we relax, listen, and make ourselves open and receptive to its dynamic working within us.

**Entering the Silence**

The expression “entering the silence” is usually misunderstood as sitting with a blank mind. One mystery of Om is its ability to produce silence through sound, sound that is essentially silence. We go deeper and deeper into the sound, the increasingly subtle sound of Om, until we reach the heart of the sound which is silence. Through our invocation of Om the state of silence is produced in our mind by enabling us to center it in the principle of the silent witnessing consciousness. Through Om the yogi leads his awareness into the silence of the spirit which is beyond the clamor of the mind and the distractions and movements of the body. For true silence is not mere absence of sound, but a profound condition of awareness that prevails at all times, even during the noise of our daily life. Silence is also a state of stillness of spirit in which all movement ceases and we know ourselves as pure consciousness alone.

**Inner psychic sounds**

It may be that sometimes you will hear various inner sounds such as a gong, bell, harp, flute, bee, waterfall, vina, bagpipes, and suchlike. These are often mistaken for genuinely spiritual phenomena when in reality they are only the astral sounds of the bodily functions. For example, the bee sound is the astral sound of cellular division, the flute sound is the astral sound of the lymphatic circulation, the bell sound is the astral sound of the cardio-pulmonary functions, and so forth. They are purely physical and have no yogic value whatsoever.

The so-called “Cosmic Om” or “Cosmic Motor” sound heard by some yogis who plug their ears and listen for it is only the astral sound of the fire element in their bodies or in and cosmos. A person who hears that
sound is hearing the astral vibration of the process of his digestion and metabolism—nothing more. That this is so is shown by the following upanishadic statement: “This fire which is within a man and digests food that is eaten is Vaisvanara. Its sound is that which one hears by stopping the ears” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.9.1). It, too, is psychic, not spiritual. Buddha described how during his intense practice of various yogas he became adept at hearing this astral sound, assuming that it was a spiritual experience, until after examining its effects he realized it was just a psychic distraction that led nowhere, and abandoned it.

In short, all such astral sounds should be ignored. Stay with your inner, mental intonations of Om.

**Higher experience**

Through the regular and prolonged practice of Om Yoga there are higher experiences and effects that will open up for the persevering meditator. As time goes on the efficiency of the practice and the resulting depth of inner experience will greatly increase, transforming the practice into something undreamed of by the beginning meditator, for the change really takes place in the yogi’s consciousness. Practice, practice, practice is the key.

We have earlier noted Shankara’s statement that the practice of yoga “has right vision alone for its goal, and glories of [external] knowledge and power are not its purpose.” Spirit-consciousness alone is true and real. The upanishadic seers indicate that the path of liberation is a very simple path—the japa and meditation of Om—and that the result is simple: realization of one’s own Self (atma) and ultimately of the Supreme Self (Paramatman).

The Katha Upanishad makes this very clear. First it speaks of what God (Brahman) really is, saying: “Brahman [is] the all-pervading spirit, the unconditioned, knowing whom one attains to freedom and achieves immortality. None beholds him with the eyes, for he is without visible form. Yet in the heart is he revealed, through self-control and meditation.
Those who know him become immortal” (Katha Upanishad 2:3:8, 9). Brahman is pure spirit, beyond all phenomena, beyond all relative existence or relative experience (objective consciousness). Brahman is not perceived by the senses, inner or outer (“none beholds him with the eyes”), yet He is revealed in the core of the yogi’s being in meditation. “Those who know him become immortal” because they experience their identity with the immortal Brahman. Next the upanishad describes the nature of meditation in which Brahman is realized. “When all the senses are stilled, when the mind is at rest, when the intellect wavers not—then, say the wise, is reached the highest state. This calm of the senses and the mind has been defined as yoga. He who attains it is freed from delusions” (Katha Upanishad 2:3:10, 11).

So here are the characteristics of meditation which the upanishad calls the highest state: 1) the senses are stilled, 2) the mind is at rest, 3) the intellect wavers not. Then the idea is really driven home by the upanishad: “This calm of the senses and the mind has been defined as yoga.” Shankara affirms that the seeker of spiritual freedom is seeking nothing from meditation “other than the special serenity of meditation practice.” This state is also called sthirattwa by the yogis. “He who attains it is freed from delusion.” When Yogiraj Lahiri Mahasaya was asked: “On which deity do you meditate?” He simply replied: “I meditate on sthirattwa”—the serenity produced by meditation in which he ever dwelt, and of which he was the embodiment.

**Two views on the nature of meditation—and a third**

In India there is a long-standing disagreement on the nature and purpose of meditation. One school of thought considers that definite and conscious evolutionary change is necessary for liberation; consequently meditation must be an actively transforming process. The other view is that the only thing needed for liberation is re-entry into our true, eternal nature. That nothing need be done at all except to perceive the truth of ourselves. Obviously their meditation procedures are going to be completely different.
There is, however, a third perspective on the matter which combines both views. It is true that we are ever-free, ever-perfect, but we have forgotten that fact and have wandered in aimless suffering for countless incarnations. No one is so foolish as to suggest to a person suffering from amnesia that he need not regain his memory since he has not ceased to be who he really is.

The memory block from which we suffer is the condition of the various levels on which we presently function, especially the buddhi, the intelligence. It is also a matter of the dislocation of our consciousness from its natural center. Obviously, then, something really does have to be done to change this condition. A dirty window need not be changed in nature, but it needs to be cleansed of that which is not its nature for us to see through it. It is the same with a dusty or smudgy mirror.

There is an example from nature that can help us understand this. Research has shown that the energy field around a salamander egg, and all through the stages of a young salamander’s growth, is in the shape of an adult salamander. This indicates that the etheric pattern of a full-grown salamander is inherent even in the egg and throughout the salamander’s development. It is as though the egg has only to hatch and grow around this energy matrix, to fill out or grow into the ever-present pattern. Even when there is only the egg visible to the human eye, the adult salamander is there in a very real, potential form. It is the same with us. We are always the Atman, potential divinity, but that potential must be realized. And meditation is the means of our realization.

Shankara puts forth the question, “How can there be a means to obtain liberation? Liberation is not a thing which can be obtained, for it is simply cessation of bondage.” He then answers himself: “For ignorance [bondage] to cease, something has to be done, with effort, as in the breaking of a fetter. Though liberation is not a ‘thing,’ inasmuch as it is cessation of ignorance in the presence of right knowledge, it is figuratively spoken of as something to be obtained.” And he concludes: “The purpose of Yoga is the knowledge of Reality.” Vyasa defines liberation
in this way: “Liberation is absence of bondage.” Shankara carries it a bit further, saying: “Nor is liberation something that has to be brought about apart from the absence of bondage, and this is why it is always accepted that liberation is eternal.”

Liberation, enlightenment, is a state that is not produced but evoked or revealed. Liberation is perception of our eternal nature. It is like something revealed by the light: it is not made existent by the light, it has been there all along in the darkness; but now the light has made it known. Om Yoga, then, is a turning, an opening, to Reality, but not attainment of Reality as something not always possessed. It is like a plant turning toward the sun; it is orientation of consciousness. It is being conscious(ness). Om Yoga establishes our consciousness in the true Self.

**True signs of progress in meditation**

In *Journey to Self-Realization*, a collection of talks by Paramhansa Yogananda, at the end of the talk entitled “The True Signs of Progress in Meditation,” he gives the following list of seven indications of progress in meditation practice:

- An increasing peacefulness during meditation.
- A conscious inner experience of calmness in meditation metamorphosing into increasing bliss.
- A deepening of one’s understanding, and finding answers to one’s questions through the calm intuitive state of inner perception.
- An increasing mental and physical efficiency in one’s daily life.
- Love for meditation and the desire to hold on to the peace and joy of the meditative state in preference to attraction to anything in the world.
- An expanding consciousness of loving all with the unconditional love that one feels toward his own dearest loved ones.
- Actual contact with God, and worshipping him as ever-new Bliss felt in meditation and in his omnipresent manifestations within and beyond all creation.
Visions

Most “visions” seen in meditation occur because the meditator has fallen asleep and is dreaming. Yet there are genuine visions, actual psychic experiences, that occur in meditation. I say “genuine,” but Ramana Maharshi gives the true facts about all visions when he says: “Visions do occur. To know how you look you must look into a mirror, but do not take that reflection to be yourself. What is perceived by our senses and the mind is never the truth. [He means this in the ultimate sense. Even hallucinations are real mental phenomena.] All visions are mere mental creations, and if you believe in them, your progress ceases. Enquire to whom the visions occur. Find out who is their witness. Stay in pure awareness, free from all thoughts. Do not move out of that state” (The Power of the Presence, vol. 3, p. 249).

Falling asleep in meditation

As mentioned before, it is normal for meditators to sometimes fall asleep while meditating, since meditation is relaxing and moves the consciousness inward. Both the body and the mind are used to entering into the state of sleep at such times. After a while, though, you will naturally (and hopefully, usually) move into the conscious sleep state, so do not worry.

At the same time, be aware that falling asleep in meditation can be a signal from your body that you are not getting enough sleep. People are different, and some do need more sleep than others. You should consider extending your sleep time or taking some kind of nap break during the day. Falling asleep in meditation can also be a symptom of a nutritional lack, an indication of low vitality.

Please do not do such things as shock your body with cold water, drink coffee, or run around a bit, hoping to force yourself to stay awake in meditation. This is not the way. Listen to your body and take care of it. Yogis are not storm-troopers. We are engaged in peace, not war.
**Physical distractions**

We have talked about mental distractions, but what about physical ones? Simple: scratch when you itch, yawn when tired, shift or stretch when you have a muscle cramp, and if you feel uncomfortable, shift your position. We are meditating, not torturing or coercing the body. Such distractions are normal and not to be concerned about. If we give them undue attention by being annoyed or disgusted with them, or trying to force our attention away from them, we will only be concentrating on them, and will compound their distracting power. In time most of these little annoyances stop occurring. Until then, just be calm and scratch and rub and move a little, while keeping your awareness where it belongs.

What about noises? Accept them. Do not wish they would stop, and do not try to not hear them. Just accept the noise as part of your present situation. Neither like nor dislike it.

Care only for your meditation, confident that a few itchings, cramping, noises, thoughts, or memories will not ruin your meditation. “Greater is he [the spirit] that is in you, than he [the body] that is in the world” (I John 4:4). It is your attention to them, either in rejection or acceptance, that will spoil your meditation. You must guard against that, and relaxation and indifference to them is the way.

**Daily meditation**

“The Self resides within the lotus of the heart. Knowing this, devoted to the Self, the sage enters daily that holy sanctuary” (Chandogya Upanishad 8:3:3).

Meditation should be done daily, and if possible it should be done twice daily, morning and evening or before and after work, whichever is more convenient.

When your period of meditation is over, do your utmost to maintain the flow of the japa of Om in time with your breathing in all your activities. For those who diligently and continually apply themselves, attainment is inevitable.
Points for Successful Meditation

When you find yourself with some time, even a few minutes, during the day, sit and meditate. Every little bit certainly does help.

Length of meditation

How long at a time should you meditate? The more you meditate the more benefit you will receive, but you should not push or strain yourself. Start with a modest time, fifteen or twenty minutes, and gradually work up to an hour or an hour and a half, perhaps once a week meditating even longer if that is practical. But do not force or burn yourself out. It is a common trick of the negative mind to have you meditate for a very long time and then skip some days or weeks and then overdo it again. It is better to do the minimum time every day without fail. Remember the tortoise and the hare.

Also, if you go about it the right way and live in the manner which makes you supremely responsive, one hour’s meditation can equal hours of meditation by the undisciplined and unpurified.

Keep it inside

Do not dissipate the calmness and centering gained through meditation by talking about it to others. Experiences in meditation are not only subtle, they are fragile, as delicate as spun glass, and speaking about them can shatter their beneficial effects. Bragging, eulogizing, and swapping notes about meditation experiences is a very harmful activity. Avoid it. Otherwise you or others may be tempted to force things or imitate one another.

Do not satisfy any curiosity about your personal yogic experiences or benefits except in the most general terms. Naturally you can tell people that meditation helps you, but do so in only a general way. When people seem truly interested in spiritual life and serious about it, give them a copy of this book and discuss the general and practical aspects freely.
Concentration

Although in this book you will find the word concentration, it is not used in the sense of forcing or tensing the mind. Rather, we are wanting to become aware—that is attentive—to the fullest degree. And this is accomplished in Om Yoga by relaxation in body, mind, and attitude. Our attention on Om is always gentle, though determined. It is not a spike we are driving into our mind. We are floating in Om, not crashing into it.

In meditation not just the body, but the mind must be relaxed. This relaxation is what most readily facilitates meditation. Think of the mind as a sponge, absolutely full of water. If you hold it in your hand, fully relaxed, all will be well. But if you grip it or squeeze it tightly, water will spray out in all directions. This is exactly how it is with the mind. If you hold it in a state of calm relaxation, very few distractions in the form of memories and thoughts will arise. But if you try to force the mind and tense it, then a multitude of distractions will arise.

Learning to continually do japa of Om

By keeping up the inner repetition of Om all the time, whatever you may be doing, you will be perpetually cultivating supreme awareness itself. A good way to get yourself habituated to the constant japa of Om is to do japa while you are reading, simply looking at or scanning the page rather than verbalizing in your mind. (This is the secret of speed reading.) Once you learn to do that, since reading demands so much attention, you will pretty well be able to keep japa going in other activities. Eventually you will able to do japa of Om even when speaking with others.

Inner negativity

Impulses to negativity or foolishness, whether mental or physical, exist in our minds in the form of samskaras or vasanas. (Samskaras are impressions in the mind produced by previous actions or experiences,
and vasanas are bundles or aggregates of similar samskaras.) Worries and anxieties about these samskaras and vasanas in the form of “sins,” “temptations,” and “wrong thinking” torment a lot of seekers uselessly. Even more futile is obsession with “getting rid of the ego.” For the Om yogi who regularly practices meditation and arranges his inner and outer life so as to avoid their counteracting or conflicting with his practice there is no need for such self-torture. Speaking of these negative and troublesome things, Shankara confidently says: “they are dissolved along with the receptacle, the chitta…. Because they have no effect, they are not given attention, for when a thing is falling of itself there is no point in searching for something to make it fall.” I. K. Taimni says: “As the object of meditation continues to fill the mind completely there can be no question of emptying the mind.”

Too upset to meditate?

I knew a man who frequently refused medication, saying, “I’m too sick right now to take medicine. I’ll take it when I feel better.” This amazed me, but we tend to do the same thing regarding meditation. It is the only way to real peace, but when our lives are being swept with the storms of grief, disaster, fear, anger, and suchlike, we say the same thing. “I am too upset to meditate. I’ll do it later.” But meditation has the ability to soothe and eliminate all disturbed thoughts and inner states. So whenever any distracted or negative conditions arise in our minds and lives, meditation is the key to peace and clear thinking.

Focus on prakriti

Om Yoga affects our energy-bodies, not our inner consciousness; it reveals our consciousness rather than changes it. The purpose of Om Yoga is liberation, and to this end it affects the prakriti (energy complex) which is the adjunct of our purusha (spirit). Because of this, it is only natural and right that thoughts, impressions, sensations and feelings of many kinds should arise as you meditate, since your meditation is
evoking them as part of the transformation process. All you need do is stay relaxed and keep on intoning Om in time with the breath.

The Om yogi is already in the Self, *is* the Self, so in Om Yoga he is looking at/into his personal prakriti in the same way God observes the evolving creation. Om Yoga purifies and evolves the bodies, including the buddhi, and realigns our consciousness with its true state, accomplishing the aims of both schools of meditational thought previously mentioned. “Om is Brahman. Om is all this. He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman” (Tatt-tiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

**Shoes**

Since we are talking about material things (prakriti), this might be a good place to mention that it is best to meditate without shoes, because shoes (whatever material they are made from) carry the vibration of the dirt they contact each day.

**A matter of magnetism**

Prana takes on many forms, including biomagnetism, the force which maintains our body and its functions. The body itself is magnetic, and any disturbance in polarity or magnetic flow is detrimental to health. Leather inhibits the natural flow of the life force (prana). Leather shoes block the upward flow of prana from the earth into our bodies, and leather belts interfere with the flow of prana within the body. On the more metaphysical side of things, the use of leather (or any slaughtered-animal-derived substance) in any manner is a violation of the principle of ahimsa, as Yogananda points out in chapter four of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It is also an infraction of the principle of shaucha.

It has long been my experience that sleeping with the head toward the north (the feet pointing south) can cause a magnetic conflict or disturbance in the body, adversely affecting sleep and even causing nervousness and restlessness. This is also the experience of many yogis I have known.
A great secret

“Receive that Word from which the Universe springeth!… How many are there who know the meaning of that Word?” asked Kabir.

Om is a great secret—the secret of enlightenment. But how is it a secret, when it has been written and talked about so much, and is repeated at the beginning and end of sacred recitations, and eulogized as the highest and holiest of mantras? A story from India will tell us how.

Once a man was taught a mantra by a yogi. “You must keep this mantra absolutely secret, for it is known to only a very few,” the yogi told him. But the next day in the morning as the man walked through the town he noticed that a great many people were repeating that mantra aloud—especially as they did their morning ablutions. Indignantly he went to the yogi, told what he had observed, and demanded to know why he had claimed the mantra was a secret known only to a few. The yogi said nothing in explanation, but brought a shining green object from his pocket and handed it to the man with the instruction that he should show it to the people he met in the town and ask them how much they would buy it for—but he was not to actually sell it to them. “When you do this, I will explain about the mantra,” he promised.

The first person he met was a woman who sold vegetables; she offered some eggplants for it, wanting it for her baby to play with. He showed it to some merchants in small shops who offered him small amounts of money for it as a curiosity. A wealthy merchant said that it was an excellent imitation emerald and offered him a goodly sum, for he wanted it to make jewelry for his wife. A banker examined it, declared it to be a genuine emerald, and offered him a great deal of money for it. Amazed by this, the man took it to a jeweler who told him that it was the largest and most perfect emerald he had ever seen. “No one in this land, not even the king, has enough money to purchase this emerald,” he concluded.

Frightened at having such a valuable in his keeping, the man hurried back to the yogi and returned the emerald. Smiling, the yogi
put it back in his pocket. “Now will you tell me why you claimed the mantra was secret, when everybody in town seems to know it?” demanded the man. “I have already done so by your experience with the emerald,” the yogi replied. “How many of the people knew what it really was?” “Only the banker and the jeweler,” the man admitted. “And the others—did not their offers for it correspond to their opinion of it and their own financial worth?” “Yes.” “There you have it. The mantra I taught you is in the memory and on the lips of many in a superficial way. They repeat it a few times and then drop it. Only those who meditate upon it can know it in truth—as they at the same time increase in spiritual status. My friend, that mantra is very little known, but I hope you will strive to realize its value by your own Self-realization through its use.”

The man understood. And so will those who come to know the secret of Om through their own practice. For it is Om that draws us out from the Primal Depths, Om that evolves us to the uttermost possibilities, and Om that liberates and returns us to the Source to share eternally in the fullness of the Life Divine.

Go Forward

Sri Ramakrishna often referred to and told the following parable.

“One upon a time a wood-cutter went into a forest to chop wood. There suddenly he met a brahmachari. The holy man said to him, ‘My good man, go forward.’ On returning home the wood-cutter asked himself, ‘Why did the brahmachari tell me to go forward?’ Some time passed. One day he remembered the brahmachari’s words. He said to himself, ‘Today I shall go deeper into the forest.’ Going deep into the forest, he discovered innumerable sandal-wood trees. He was very happy and returned with cart-loads of sandal-wood. He sold them in the market and became very rich.

“A few days later he again remembered the words of the holy man to go forward. He went deeper into the forest and discovered a silver-mine
near a river. This was even beyond his dreams. He dug out silver from
the mine and sold it in the market. He got so much money that he didn’t
even know how much he had.

“A few more days passed. One day he thought: ‘The brahmachari
didn’t ask me to stop at the silver-mine; he told me to go forward.’
This time he went to the other side of the river and found a gold-
mine. Then he exclaimed: ‘Ah, just see! This is why he asked me to
going forward.’

“Again, a few days afterwards, he went still deeper into the forest and
found heaps of diamonds and other precious gems. He took these also
and became as rich as the god of wealth himself.

“Therefore I say that, whatever you may do, you will find better and
better things if only you go forward. You may feel a little ecstasy as
the result of japa, but don’t conclude from this that you have achieved
everything in spiritual life…. If you go still farther you will realize God.
You will see him. In time you will converse with him.”

It is important to keep on in regular yoga practice. It is easy to
understand that people may mistake delusions for enlightenment, but we
must realize that it is also possible to mistake very real stages in spiritual
progress as being the final stage, the ultimate enlightenment, when in
reality there is much more territory to be traversed before arriving at
the supreme goal of perfect union with God.

In the Yoga Sutras (1:30) Patanjali list the various obstacles to enlight-
enment. One is bhranti-darshana: delusion or erroneous view. Regarding
this, I. K. Taimni has written: “This means taking a thing for what it
is not. It is due generally to lack of intelligence and discrimination. A
Sadhaka may, for example, begin to see lights and hear sounds of various
kinds during his early practices. These things are very spurious and do
not mean much and yet there are many Sadhakas who get excited about
these trivial experiences and begin to think they have made great progress.
Some think that they have reached high states of consciousness or are
even foolish enough to think that they have seen God. This incapacity
to assess our supernormal experiences at their proper worth is basically
due to immaturity of soul and those who cannot distinguish between
the essential and non-essential things in spiritual unfoldment find their
progress blocked at a very early stage. They tend to get entangled in these
spurious experiences of a psychic nature and are soon side-tracked. It
is easy to see that the unhealthy excitement which accompanies such
undesirable conditions of the mind will cause great distraction and
prevent it from diving inwards.”

Therefore the yogi must keep on all the days of his life. After death
it will be seen by what world (loka) he rises to what stage he has really
reached. Sri Ramakrishna also said: “Even if one has attained Knowl-
dge, one must still constantly practice God-Consciousness…. What
is the use of polishing the outside of a metal pot one day only? If you
don’t polish it regularly it will get tarnished again…. A brass pot must
be polished every day; otherwise it gets stained.”

And so it is with the mind and heart of the yogi. Buddha is our perfect
example. To the very last day of his life he meditated regularly, often
withdrawing into solitude for prolonged periods of intense meditation.
Further, every day he followed the same routine that all the monks of the
Sangha followed. He never slacked off or abandoned any practice. Never
did he neglect spiritual practice and discipline under the pretense that
he no longer needed it. He diligently followed the counsel of Krishna:
“Your motive in working should be to set others, by your example, on the
path of duty. Whatever a great man does, ordinary people will imitate;
they follow his example. Consider me: I am not bound by any sort of
duty. There is nothing, in all the three worlds, which I do not already
possess; nothing I have yet to acquire. But I go on working, nevertheless”
(Bhagavad Gita 3:20-22).

Go forward.
Sri Ramakrishna frequently spoke of some people who planned to travel overnight on a river in order to attend a wedding the next day. When it was dark they got in the boat and rowed the entire night. When it began to dawn, they saw to their dismay that they were still at the place they started! Why? Because they had not hauled in the anchor and so stayed in one spot.

It is the same with religion and yoga. We can work and work at it, doing many spiritual deeds and practices, yet get nowhere—maybe even regress. Why? Because we have not “weighed anchor and cast off from the shore” of samsara and worldliness—especially in the matter of disciplines and purifications. That is why the first limb of Patanjali’s yoga is yama and niyama. Without perfect observance of these ten principles no one can succeed in yoga and spiritual life.

Toward the end of his comments on the Yoga Sutras, Shankara makes a valuable remark: “There can be no lamplight unless the oil, wick and a flame are brought together.” The idea is that the successful practice of yoga is not a haphazard or capricious matter. All the elements must be brought together. When united and complete, success is the result.

Since the classical Indian texts on Yoga are the basis of this chapter, the word “yoga” is used throughout. But it should be realized that the
word “meditation” is equally applicable, for in ancient India yoga and meditation were synonymous.

**Prerequisites for yoga**

“Yoga is for the purpose of knowledge of truth,” says Shankara. Knowledge (jnana) does not come about from practice of yoga methods alone. Perfection in knowledge is in fact only for those who practice virtue (dharma) as well as yoga.

All things rest upon something else— that is, all things are supported by another. This is because a foundation is needed for anything to exist. Being Himself the Ultimate Support of all things, God alone is free from this necessity. Yoga, then, also requires support. As Trevor Leggett says in his introduction to Shankara’s commentary on the Yoga Sutras: “This is yoga presented for the man of the world, who must first clear, and then steady, his mind against the fury of illusory passions, and free his life from entanglements.” Patanjali very carefully and fully outlines the elements of the support needed by the aspirant, giving invaluable information on how to guarantee success in yoga.

The first Yoga Sutra says: “Now the exposition of yoga,” implying that there must be something leading up to yoga in the form of necessary developments of consciousness and personality. These prerequisites are known as Yama and Niyama. Shankara says quite forcefully that “following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga.”

**Yama and Niyama**

Yama and Niyama are often called the Ten Commandments of Yoga, but they have nothing to do with the ideas of sin and virtue or good and evil as dictated by some cosmic potentate. Rather they are determined by a thoroughly practical, pragmatic basis: that which strengthens and facilitates our yoga practice should be observed and that which weakens or hinders it should be avoided. It is not a matter of being good or bad,
but of being wise or foolish. Each one of these Five Don’ts (Yama) and Five Do’s (Niyama) is a supporting, liberating foundation of Yoga.

Yama means self-restraint in the sense of self-mastery, or abstention, and consists of five elements. Niyama means observances, of which there are also five. Here is the complete list of these ten Pillars as given in Yoga Sutras 2:30,32:

1. Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness
2. Satya: truthfulness, honesty
3. Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness
4. Brahmacharya: sexual continence in thought, word and deed as well as control of all the senses
5. Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness
6. Shaucha: purity, cleanliness
7. Santosha: contentment, peacefulness
8. Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline
9. Swadhyaya: introspective self-study, spiritual study
10. Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one’s life to God

All of these deal with the innate powers of the human being—or rather with the abstinence and observance that will develop and release those powers to be used toward our spiritual perfection, to our self-realization and liberation. Shankara says quite forcefully that “following yama and niyama is the basic qualification to practice yoga. The qualification is not simply that one wants to practice yoga. So yama and niyama are methods of yoga” in themselves and are not mere adjuncts or aids that can be optional.

But at the same time, the practice of yoga helps the aspiring yogi to follow the necessary ways of yama and niyama, so he should not be discouraged from taking up yoga right now. He should determinedly embark on yama, niyama, and yoga simultaneously. Success will be his.
Ahimsa: non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras, Vyasa begins his exposition of ahimsa: “Ahimsa means in no way and at no time to do injury to any living being.” “In no capacity and in no fashion to give injury to any being,” says Shankara. This would include injury by word or thought as well as the obvious injury perpetrated by deed, for Shankara comments: “Ahimsa is to be practiced in every capacity–body, speech, and mind.”

Even a simple understanding of the law of karma enables us to realize the terrible consequences of murder for the murderer. As Vyasa explains: “The killer deprives the victim of spirit, hurts him with a blow of a weapon, and then tears him away from life. Because he has deprived another of spirit, the supports of his own life, animate or inanimate, become weakened. Because he has caused pain, he experiences pain himself…. Because he has torn another from life, he goes to live in a life in which every moment he wishes to die, because the retribution as pain has to work itself right out, while he is panting for death.”

Ahimsa is not willfully causing any harm or pain whatsoever to any being whatsoever, in any degree whatsoever. Ahimsa includes strict abstinence from any form of injury in act, speech, or thought. Violence, verbal or physical, causing mental injury or pain, and angry or malicious damage or misuse of physical objects are all violations of ahimsa, unthinkable for the yogi.

Vyasa immediately points out that all the other abstinences and observances–yama and niyama–are really rooted in ahimsa, for they involve preventing harm to ourselves and to others through negative action or the neglect of positive action: “The other niyamas and yamas are rooted in this, and they are practiced only to bring this to its culmination, only for perfecting this. They are taught only as means to bring this out in its purity. For so it is said: ‘Whatever many vows the man of Brahman [God] would undertake, only in so far as he thereby refrains from doing harm impelled by delusion, does he bring out ahimsa in its
purity.” And Shankara explains that Vyasa is referring to delusion that is “rooted in violence and causing violence.”

In his autobiography Paramhansa Yogananda relates that his guru, Swami Yukteswar Giri, said that ahimsa is absence of the desire to injure. In the highest sense ahimsa is a state of mind from which non-injury will naturally proceed. “Ahimsa really denotes an attitude and mode of behavior towards all living creatures based on the recognition of the underlying unity of life,” the modern commentator Taimni declares. Shankara remarks that when ahimsa and the others are observed “the cause of one’s doing harm becomes inoperative.” The ego itself becomes “harmless” by being put into a state of non-function. And meditation dissolves it utterly. But until that interior state is established, we must work backwards from outward to inner, and abstain from all forms of injury.

The aspiring yogi must clearly realize that the observance of ahimsa must include strict abstinence from the eating of animal flesh in any form or degree as well as the use of anything obtained by or derived from the slaughter of animals.

He must do nothing in thought, word, or deed that harms his body, mind, or spirit. On the other hand, he must do whatever benefits the body, mind, and spirit, for their omission is also a form of self-injury, as is the non-observance of any of the yama or niyamas.

It is no simple thing to be a yogi.

**Satya: truthfulness, honesty**

“Satya is said to be speech and thought in conformity with what has been seen or inferred or heard on authority. The speech spoken to convey one’s own experience to others should be not deceitful, nor inaccurate, nor uninformative. It is that uttered for helping all beings. But that uttered to the harm of beings, even if it is what is called truth, when the ultimate aim is merely to injure beings, would not be truth. It would be a wrong.” So says Vyasa.
Shankara says that truthfulness means saying what we have truly come to know is the truth—mostly through our own experience or through contact with sources whose reliability we have experienced for ourselves. “Untruthfulness in any form puts us out of harmony with the fundamental law of Truth and creates a kind of mental and emotional strain which prevents us from harmonizing and tranquillizing our mind. Truthfulness has to be practiced by the sadhaka because it is absolutely necessary for the unfoldment of intuition. There is nothing which clouds the intuition and practically stops its functioning as much as untruthfulness in all its forms,” says Taimni regarding the most personal and practical aspect of satya.

Bending the truth, either in leaving out part of the truth or in “stacking the deck” to create a false impression, cannot be engaged in by the yogi. Regarding numbers it is said that “figures do not lie—but liars figure.” The same is true here. Equally heinous is the intentional mixing of lies and truth. (Some liars tell a lot of truth.) This is particularly true in the manipulative endeavors of advertising, politics, and religion.

Refusing to speak the truth, as well as avoiding speaking or facing the truth, is a form of untruth.

There are many non-verbal forms of lying as well, and some people’s entire life is a lie. Therefore we must make sure that our actions reflect the truth. How many people claim to believe in God and spiritual principles, but do not live accordingly? How many people continually swear and express loyalty and yet are betrayers? We must not only speak the truth, we must live it.

Honesty in all our speaking and dealings with others is an essential part of truthfulness. It is absolutely crucial that the yogi make his livelihood only by honest and truthful means. Selling useless or silly things, convincing people that they need them (or even selling them without convincing them), is a serious breach of truthfulness.

Trying to compromise the truth, even a little, making the excuse that “everybody does it” is not legitimate. For “everybody” is bound to
the wheel of birth and death because they do it—and that is not what we wish for ourselves. We can lie to ourselves, to others, and even to God; but we cannot lie to the cosmos. Karma, the law of cause and effect, will react upon us to our own pain.

It is interesting that Vyasa considers that truthful speech is informative. By that he means that truthful speech is worthwhile, relevant, and practical. To babble mindlessly and grind out verbal trivia is also a form of untruth, even if not objectively false. Nor is foolish speech to anyone’s gain. Sometimes also people lie by “snowing” us with a barrage of words intended to deflect us from our inquiries. And nearly all of us who went to college remember the old game of padding out written assignments, giving lots of form but little content in hope of fooling the teachers into thinking the student knew the subject well and was saying something worthwhile—even profound. This is one of today’s most lucrative businesses, especially in the advertising world.

Speaking truth to the hurt of others is not really truth, since satya is an extension of ahimsa. For example, a person may be ugly, but to say, “You are ugly” is not a virtue. “What is based on injuring others, even though free from the three defects of speech (i.e., not deceitful, nor inaccurate, nor uninformative), does not amount to truth,” according to Shankara.

Our intention must never be to hurt in any way, but we must be aware that there are some people who hate the truth in any form and will accuse us of hurting them by our honesty. Such persons especially like to label any truth (or person) they dislike as “harsh,” “rigid,” “divisive,” “negative” “hateful,” and so on and on and on. We would have to become dishonest or liars to placate them. So “hurting” or offending them is a consequence of truthfulness that we will have to live with. The bottom line is that truth “is that uttered for helping all beings.” For non-injury is not a passive quality, but the positive character of restoration and healing.

Silence can also be a form of untruth, particularly in dealing with the aforementioned truth-haters. For truth is only harmful when “the
ultimate aim is merely to injure beings.” But if some people put themselves in the way of truth, then they must take responsibility for their reactions to it.

Will Cuppy defined diplomacy as “the fine art of lying.” Sadly, it often is. So we must be sure that we do not deceive under the guise of diplomacy or tactfulness.

Self-deception, a favorite with nearly all of us to some degree, must be ruthlessly eliminated if we would be genuinely truthful.

“Therefore let one take care that his speech is for the welfare of all,” concludes Shankara.

Asteya: non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriation

Asteya is abstinence from stealing, which Vyasa defines as: “the improper appropriation to oneself of others’ things.” He then concludes: “Refusal to do it, in freedom from desire, is non-stealing.”

What constitutes ordinary stealing is well known to almost all, but human beings have thought up countless ways to steal and not seem to be stealing—all the way from putting slugs in pay telephones to getting people to give us things or money which we neither need nor deserve. Theft and untruth are certainly interrelated. So we must analyze Vyasa’s definition and apply it to our situation. But we can consider a few “fudges” that have become respectable and prevalent.

Taking credit that really belongs to another.

Plagiarism, especially in academic matters.

Taking what is not ours, while pretending that we either own it or have it coming to us.

Taking what is not legitimately coming to us, even if freely given. People do this continually in relation to welfare benefits and insurance claims.

Demanding more than a just price or a just wage.

No paying debts—including taxes.

Forcing others to give us something we want from them, whether material or metaphysical.
Not giving to others what we owe them or what we are legally or morally obligated to give.

A lot of people (especially churches and religious groups) expect others to continually give them things or services which they are perfectly capable of paying for. (I am not speaking about unsolicited gifts or charity—that is virtuous.) Or they want big discounts given to them.

Once a natural health practitioner—whose financial situation was much worse than mine—told me that she was willing to charge only half her usual fee for my treatment, and would even treat me for free if I wanted. I explained to her that since I could afford the full amount it would be stealing from her for me to either accept a discount or free treatment. And I cited the Yoga Sutras in support of my contention. The law applies to all.

The prophet Malachi posed the question, “Will a man rob God?” (Malachi 3:8) That is extremely easy to do and extremely common. We all need to ponder that possibility seriously and see if in some way we are doing that very thing.

But all these forms of stealing are inner or outer acts, whereas Vyasa defines non-stealing as essentially a psychological state of “freedom from desire.” This, then, is the goal of abstinence from stealing. What must be attained is the state of mind in which there is absolutely no desire or impulse to steal. “Stealing cannot exist in those whose desire has been cut off,” says Shankara.

**Brahmacharya: continence**

“Brahmacharya is restraint of the sex organ and other senses,” says Vyasa. From this we see that brahmacharya has a twofold nature: control and continence.

**Control:** Spirit has two aspects: consciousness and energy. Consciousness is constant, whereas energy is cyclic. It is the movement of energy that produces (and is) our experience of relativity, and it is
the development of energy that is the process of evolution. Therefore the conservation and application of energy is the main determinant of success or failure in spiritual endeavor. Diffusion and dissipation of energy always weakens us. Hence brahmacharya is a vital element of Yoga, without which we cannot successfully pursue the greater life of Higher Consciousness.

Basically, brahmacharya is conservation and mastery of all the energy systems and powers of our being. This is especially true in relation to negative emotions, for tremendous energy is expended through lust, anger, greed, envy, hatred, resentment, depression, fear, obsession, and the rest. Further, they are both the causes and the symptoms of losing self-control, a major aspect of brahmacharya. Research has shown that persons in the grip of these emotions literally breathe out vital elements of the body. For example, the breath of angry people is found to be laden with copper. So negative emotion depletes us physically as well as energetically. Positive emotions on the other hand actually enhance and raise our energy and physical levels. The cultivation of (true) love, compassion, generosity, cheerfulness, friendliness, and suchlike make us stronger and calmer—essential aspects of brahmacharya. It is noteworthy that the word “virtue” is derived from the Latin word *virtus*—power—which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word *virya*, which means both power and strength.

“A place for everything and everything in its place,” is not just a maxim of orderliness. When applied to the individual’s energy systems it is the root of strength and health on all levels. Every atom of personal energy possessed by us has both a place and a purpose. To ensure correct placement, and expenditure, of energy is the essence of the yogic science. And brahmacharya is its foundation.

**Continence:** Sexuality is usually considered the main focus of brahmacharya because it has such a powerful grip and influence on the human being. It is considered that if sex is mastered, all the senses will be mastered as well. There is simply no way to convince those addicted
The Foundations of Yoga

to and enslaved by sex that continence is supreme wisdom. But a few facts can be meaningful to the sincere seeker.

The life of the senses stifles the life of the spirit by carrying away the discrimination of the intellect, as Krishna says: “The mind, which follows in the wake of the wandering senses, carries away discrimination, as the wind a boat on the waters.” (Bhagavad Gita 2:67) The basic life-force, the prana, is dissipated through any intense activity of the senses, thus weakening the inner being. But sexual indulgence is incalculably more destructive of consciousness than any other form of sense experience, for it expends the life-force to a degree far, far beyond that of other sense experiences. Both body and mind are depleted through sexual activity.

The Prashna Upanishad concludes: “It is in those who have tapas and brahmacharya that truth is established.” (Prashna Upanishad 1:15) The Gita speaks of the worthy yogis as being “firm in their vow of brahmacharya.” (Bhagavad Gita 6:14)

For practical information on brahmacharya the following books are extremely valuable: WARNING: Sex May Be Hazardous to Your Health by Dr. Edwin Flatto, Science Discovers The Physiological Value of Continence and Nutritional Sex Control and Rejuvenation by the great twentieth century Rosicrucian, Dr. Raymond Bernard, The Practice of Brahmacharya, by Swami Sivananda, and The Role of Celibacy in Spiritual Life by Swami Chidananda.

Aparigraha: non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness

Aparigraha includes the ideas of non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, and non-acquisitiveness. Vyasa’s definition is most practical: “Seeing the defects in objects involved in acquiring them, and defending them, and losing them, and being attached to them, and depriving others of them, one does not take them to himself, and that is aparigraha.” Here, as in the other foundations, the true virtue or
observance is mostly internal, leading to the correct state of mind for successful yoga practice.

Basically, when a person sees all the effort expended on “things” as well as the unhappiness attendant on both keeping and losing them—what to speak of awareness of their inherent defects—he wisely backs away and frees himself from Thingolatry. Of course we all have to obtain and use many kinds of things, but we can do so objectively, not letting ourselves get stuck up in them like the tar baby of the Uncle Remus story. Being possessed by possessions is truly a great misery; and the belief that happiness comes from external things is truly a great folly.

People do literally lose themselves in “stuff,” for they adopt a completely false self-concept. To think that we are what we “have” is to forget who and why we are. Aparigraha clears the inner eye and lets us see our true “face.”

The Great Vow

After listing ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha, Patanjali continues: “These, not conditioned by class, place, time or occasion, and extending to all stages, constitute the Great Vow.” (Yoga Sutra 2:31) They are the Great Vow because they require the exercise of will and because of their dynamic effect on us. Even more, they are great because, like the elements, they are self-sufficient, depending on nothing else, and because they cannot be mutated into something else. They are always what they are, and for that reason they are always to be observed with no exceptions whatsoever. They cannot be neglected or omitted for any reason—absolutely. Patanjali lists the possible conditions which do affect lesser observances: class, place, time or occasion, and stages. A brief consideration of each will be helpful.

Class. No one can mitigate or omit the observance of ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, and aparigraha because of “who” he “is.” In yoga, too, no one is above the law. That is, no one can produce the effects of Yama without their observance. I knew an Archbishop with a quick sense
of humor. Once he made a pungent remark about someone, and a woman objected, saying, “That remark is not Christian.” He simply smiled and replied, “Madam, I do not have to be a Christian—I am an Archbishop!” This is an attitude of many, springing from the blindness of egotism.

*Place.* Whatever may be the ways of a particular place or group of people in which we may find ourselves, the observances of Yama are incumbent upon us. “When in Rome do as the Romans” is one of the silliest axioms ever coined. Peer pressure must never be an influence on us. Nor should unjust rules or laws have any effect on us. What is right must always be done. The will or opinion of others cannot change our obligation to observe the Great Vow. Nor can external conditions change it. Not even to save our lives can we turn from what is forever right.

*Time or occasion.* Human beings have for some reason always thought that “now” abrogates what was right or true in the past. It does not. Nor does a situation effect any change in what must be done by us as aspirants to yoga. Aversion to being “out of step” or “alienated from society” has no place in the mind and heart of the yogi.

*Stage.* We never “get beyond” the observance of the Great Vow. Those at the very end of the spiritual journey are as obligated to fulfil the Great Vow as those who are at the beginning. Also, we cannot “go too far” or “overdo” our observance of the Vow. It is all or nothing. “Ahimsa and the others are to be maintained all the time and in all circumstances and in regard to all objects without any conscious lapse,” declares Vyasa. Shankara points out that the Great Vow must be observed by us in relation to all beings—not just confined to humans.

Once again we see the psychological nature of the five components of the Great Vow and how their observance is based upon the courage, self-respect, and self-knowledge of the yogi.

**Shaucha:** purity, cleanliness

Shaucha means purity and cleanliness within the context of attaining unobstructed clarity of consciousness. “This Brahman, this Self,
deep-hidden in all beings, is not revealed to all; but to the seers, pure in heart, concentrated in mind— to them is he revealed.” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:12) “When through discrimination the heart has become pure, then, in meditation, the Self is revealed.” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.8) “When the senses are purified, the heart is purified; when the heart is purified, there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the Self; when there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the Self, all bonds are loosed and freedom is attained.” (Chandogya Upanishad 7:26:2) Which is why Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) And Saint John: “Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” (I John 3:2,3)

“Internal shaucha is the washing away of the stains of the mind” according to Vyasa. “Shaucha implies purity in seeing and listening… and washing away the stains of the mind, such as desire and anger, by the waters of meditation,” adds Shankara.

Physical cleanliness is important for it eliminates bodily toxins and prevents disease. Inner purification is important for it eliminates mental toxins and prevents inner ills. For the yogi, the most important external aspect of shaucha is purity of diet. This is because the food we eat determines the vibration of our body and our mind. For this reason it is only wisdom to eat a purely vegetarian diet.

Those who carefully—yes, scrupulously—adhere to a vegetarian diet, omitting all meat, fish, and eggs, and avoiding anything that contains them to any degree will perceive how valuable it is to keep such a dietary regimen. Not only will their general health improve greatly (assuming that they eat a balanced and nutritious vegetarian diet), they will see how much lighter and intuitive their minds become. A vegetarian diet greatly facilitates the practice of meditation, making very subtle states of consciousness readily attainable and perceptible. Those who have eaten meat, fish, and eggs for a long time may have to wait a while before fully gaining the benefits of vegetarianism, but it will not be long before they begin to see its beneficial effects to some degree.
Vegetarian diet is a crown jewel for the yogi since it embodies the foundations of ahimsa, asteya, aparigraha, shaucha, and tapas and produces purity and clarity of mind and heart.

There is another, far-reaching aspect to shaucha. While discussing the process of evolution, Vyasa and Shankara also speak about the way to infuse ourselves with higher consciousness. They give the simile of terraced fields on a mountainside. The farmer floods the highest field. When it has received enough water, he then breaks the earth barrier between it and the next, lower field, and the water pours down into it and fills it. And so the process goes until all the fields are watered. Vyasa then firmly declares that mere right or good action or external religiosity effect nothing in the way of transformation into a higher grade of consciousness, but that rather it is a matter of the removal of obstacles to higher consciousness that is needed. He points out that no effort is needed to get the water into the field—or the higher consciousness into the individual—except that expended in the removal of the barriers. So the secret is to remove whatever blocks the process of evolution, and it will occur as spontaneously as the water pours down into the field.

It is the removal of obstacles that is the highest form of shaucha. To underscore this, Vyasa continues: “Then again, a farmer in his field cannot force the nutrients of water or earth into the roots of his grain. What does he do, then? He removes the obstructing weeds. With these gone, the nutrients enter, of themselves, the roots of the grain.” In the same way, when negative karmas, habits, deeds, thoughts, influences, associations, and situations are uprooted from our minds and lives, the higher consciousness and states of evolution will occur naturally. This is exceedingly important for us to keep in mind. For it is purity (shaucha) in this form that enables the divine light to reach us.

**Santosha: contentment, peacefulness**

Santosha consists of the passive aspect of contentment and peacefulness and the more positive aspect of joy and happiness. Santosha
is a fundamentally cheerful attitude based on a harmonious interior condition and an intellectually spiritual outlook. This is possible only through meditation, and is one of the signs of progress in meditation. This must not be equated with mere intellectual “positive thinking” or a forced external “happiness” which is a camouflage, not a real state. Santosha is an inner-based quality that occurs spontaneously. It need not be cultivated or “acted out” any more than the blossoming of a flower.

Santosha is also contentment with simple living, and relates to aparigraha. Vyasa says that “santosha is being satisfied with the resources at hand and so not desiring more.” Shankara says: “As a result of the satisfaction with what is at hand, even though there may be some lack, he has the feeling, ‘It is enough.’” Santosha is freedom from the “bigger and more is better” syndrome that grips most of us.

Santosha is also the absence of negative emotions and the presence of positive emotions. In its highest form santosha is the contentment and peace that comes from resting in our own spirit.

**Tapas: austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline**

Tapas literally means “to generate heat” in the sense of awakening or stimulating the whole of our being to higher consciousness. It is commonly applied to the practice of spiritual discipline, especially that which involves some form of physical austerity or self-denial. The sages of ancient India were very conversant with the principles of physics and formulated their symbols accordingly. When an object is heated, its molecules begin to move at a faster rate than usual. Thus, tapas is a procedure that causes all the components of the yogi to vibrate at a much higher rate, and to eventually become permanently established in that higher vibration.

Regarding physical tapas Vyasa writes: “Tapas is endurance of the opposites. The opposites are hunger and thirst, heat and cold, standing and sitting, complete silence and merely verbal silence.” (“In complete silence, nothing like hand-signs is allowed, whereas in the limited silence,
indications by hands, etc., are permitted and it is only actual speech
that is banned,” according to Shankara.) Shankara says these opposites
may occur naturally or by our own choice through self-denial. And
both Vyasa and Shankara say that tapas is always done in the light of
the capability of the yogi and is never exaggerated, strenuous, or beyond
the yogi’s natural ability.

Basically, tapas is spiritual discipline that produces a perceptible
result, particularly in the form of purification. Tapas is the turning
from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to the Light, from death
to Immortality. But it is never a matter of mere thought or desire, it is
always practical action towards that end. Consequently, whenever tapas
is spoken of it always implies the practice of yoga and the observances
that facilitate yoga practice.

We are dual in nature: consciousness and energy, spirit and matter.
This being so, we need to realize that although we are essentially con-
sciousness (spirit) we are also energy, and therefore we are our bodies and
our minds. Or rather, we are the conscious intelligence that manifests
as our bodies and minds. Our lives need to be lived in this perspective.
For example, when we understand this truth we understand why such
observances or disciplines as yama, niyama, vegetarianism, and moral
conduct are so beneficial and necessary for us.

Swadhyaya: introspective self-study, spiritual study

Swadhyaya means “self-study.” This is usually interpreted as the
study of the sacred texts which deal with the nature of the true Self
(spirit) and its realization. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation
(moksha),” says Vyasa. “Swadhyaya is study of works on liberation such
as the Upanishads,” comments Shankara. But it also means keeping a
careful watch on the ego-based mind so as to be aware of its delusive
and destructive tricks. For it is no external “devil” or “Satan” we need
fear, but the “enemy within,” the “Dweller at the Threshold” which is
our ego-mind complex that has blinded and enslaved us from life to life
and has no intention of giving up its domination of us just because we practice a bit of meditation. Therefore we must be wary of its cunning and subtle ways and carefully analyze the debris it casts up into our consciousness in the form of thoughts and emotions. In this way we will see the direction in which it would pull us. We must take our susceptibility to its machinations most seriously. In swadhyaya we look at and analyze the mind in the calmness and intuition born of meditation.

The highest form of self-study is that which is known as atma vichar—inquiry into the self (spirit). We must never let go of the vital question: Who am I? We must do all we can to find the answer—not from others or from our intellectual ponderings, but by direct experience of ourselves as pure spirit. Taimni puts it this way: “Though swadhyaya begins with intellectual study it must be carried through the progressive stages of reflection, meditation, tapas, etc. to the point where the sadhaka is able to gain all knowledge or devotion from within, by his own efforts. That is the significance of the prefix swa (self) in swadhyaya. He leaves all external aids such as books, discourses, etc. and dives into his own mind for everything he needs in his quest.”

**Ishwarapranidhana: offering of one’s life to God**

The final foundation, for which all the others are a necessary preparation, is Ishwarapranidhana—the offering of one’s life to God. This is far more on every level than simple religious devotion, and much more than any kind of discipline or self-denial done in the name of spirituality. *It is the giving to God of the yogi’s entire life*, not just a giving of material offerings or occasional tidbits of devotion to God, however fervent or sincere. Moreover, as Taimni points out: “The fact that the progressive practice of Ishwarapranidhana can ultimately lead to samadhi shows definitely that it signifies a much deeper process of transformation in the sadhaka than a mere acceptance of whatever experiences and ordeals come to him in the course of his life….The practice of Ishwarapranidhana therefore begins with the mental assertion ‘Not my will but Thy will be
done’ but it does not end there. There is a steady effort to bring about a continuous recession of consciousness from the level of the personality which is the seat of ‘I’ consciousness into the consciousness of the Supreme Whose will is working out in the manifest world.”

Ishwarapranidhana is total giving. The yogi does not eke out droplets of his life, but pours out his entire life in offering unto God. He gives all that he has—even his very Self. And this is only sensible, for the entire aim of yoga is the reunion of the individual spirit with the Supreme Spirit, the falling of the drop into the Immortal Sea. Ishwarapranidhana anticipates this divine union and ensures its accomplishment. This is why the first law-giver, Manu, says that the highest sacrifice (medha) is purushamedha—the sacrifice of the individual spirit.

Ishwarapranidhana is also mentioned in Sutra 1:23, where Patanjali says that the attainment of samadhi is brought near to the yogi “by offering of the life to God.” Vyasa comments: “As a result of Ishwarapranidhana, which is bhakti [devotion and love for God], the Lord bends down to him and rewards him,…and the attainment of samadhi and its fruit is near at hand.” Shankara says: “The Lord comes face-to-face with him and gives His grace to the yogi who is fully devoted to Him…. The grace is effortlessly gained through the omnipotence of the Supreme Lord. By that grace of the Lord, samadhi and its fruit are soon attainable.”

It is incontrovertible, then, that yoga is a thoroughly theistic endeavor, one which makes God the center of life and its aim, as well.

The results of perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama

Shankara makes a very bold—and bald—statement about yoga: “Success in yoga is determined by result alone…observable by direct perception.” As the ever-memorable Dr. Bronner used to say: “Judge only by the amazing results.”

Patanjali lists siddhis—psychic powers or effects—that result from the perfect observance of yama and niyama. Since yama and niyama deal with the innate powers of the human being—or rather with the abstinence and
observance that will develop and release those powers—the manifestation of the development and perfecting of those powers will be automatic.

Before considering the specific siddhis resulting from perfection in yama and niyama, it should be explained that perfection in these virtues means that the ignorance which causes their opposites such as injury, lying, and stealing, has been completely eliminated from the yogi, and also that their reappearance in his thought, speech, or behavior has become absolutely impossible. So perfection (siddhi) in yama and niyama is not a matter of action or inaction but one of perfected consciousness.

**Perfection in ahimsa**

“On being firmly established in non-violence [ahimsa] there is abandonment of hostility in his presence.” (Yoga Sutra 2:35) The eminently desirable nature of this siddhi is evident. Wherever a yogi perfected in ahimsa may be, there no hostility can arise; and if it is already present somewhere, upon the yogi’s entry it will cease. The one perfected in ahimsa is a living fulfillment of the Prayer of Saint Francis, and is truly an instrument of divine peace. This was true of Buddha in whose presence hired assassins and even a mad elephant became at peace and incapable of doing harm. “This happens with all living beings,” says Vyasa. Many times it has been observed that in the presence of perfected sages wild animals become tame, even friendly, not only toward human beings but even toward their usual enemies or prey. “In the presence of that one who follows ahimsa, even natural enemies like snake and mongoose give up their antagonism,” says Shankara. Violent human beings, too, have become peaceful and gentle after contact with holy people in whom ahimsa was completely realized.

**Perfection in satya**

“On being firmly established in truthfulness [satya], the result of action rests upon him alone.” (Yoga Sutra 2:36) Luckily, we have quite a few authoritative commentaries to elucidate this obscure language. All
are unanimous in saying that when the yogi is firmly established in truth in all its aspects, then whatever he says or wills comes about without any action being needed to produce it. As Vyasa explains: “When he says: ‘Be righteous,’ that man becomes righteous; told by him: ‘Do you attain heaven,’ that one attains heaven. His word is infallible.” “When truth is firm in him, events confirm his words,” adds Shankara. Yoganananda gives an example of this in the first chapter of his autobiography. My friend, Sri Abani Lahiri, told me that his grandfather had the same power even as a child. Once he became angry with another little boy and said, “You should die!” Immediately that boy became deathly ill and was declared by the doctors to have only a few hours of life remaining. When his parents were told, “That Brahmin boy told him to die,” they called for him and asked him to tell their son to live. He did so, and the boy was immediately well. Jesus, too, had this power as a child and had to learn how to control it, as recorded in the “apocryphal” gospels. By the power of his word Sri Ramakrishna caused hibiscus blossoms of two different colors to grow on the same plant. At the end of his earthly life, anyone who heard Sri Ramakrishna speak of spiritual awakening became spiritually awakened.

Perfection in asteya

“On being firmly established in non-stealing [asteya], all kinds of precious things come to him.” (Yoga Sutra 2:37) Another translation of the second half of the sutra can be: “All kinds of precious things present themselves to him.” All the treasuries of earth not only are open to someone perfect in asteya, their contents actively seek him out. Yet such a one neither desires or seeks them. If he did, they would no longer come to him. Precious things may be given by others to those perfected in asteya, or simply appear from the divine hand of Providence. The former Shankaracharya of Joshi Matt, Jagadguru Brahmananda Saraswati, refused to allow anyone to donate money either to himself or to the monastery, whose expenses were great. Yet, he had a box which was
always filled with money from which he provided for all the monastery’s needs. Yogananda had a little box with a slot in the top where he put in or took out money without counting or keeping record. Yet it was always full. Sri Brahma Chaitanya, a Maharashtrian saint who lived into the twentieth century, was known to be without any resources whatsoever and lived in total frugality. Yet he once made a pilgrimage to Benares where he gave away a tremendous amount of money to the poor and the monastics. As he sat on a simple mat, he kept putting his hand under it and producing the money from an inexhaustible supply. Paramhansa Nityananda literally pulled fortunes in rupees from his clothing to pay for projects he was supervising. Some yogis can simply reach up in the air and bring down anything they desire.

**Perfection in brahmacharya**

“On being firmly established in brahmacharya, vigor [virya] is gained.” (Yoga Sutra 2:37) Virya is not ordinary physical strength, but an almost supernatural power that manifests as strength of body, mind, and spirit. When through brahmacharya the yogi’s normal bodily power is conserved, a marvellous alchemical change takes place, augmenting and transmuting his energies to a level unknown to others. The truth that those who keep their bodily energies intact can accomplish whatever they will has been demonstrated for thousands of years by celibates of all lands and spiritual traditions.

Regarding the brahmachari possessed of virya, Shankara says: “He brings out great qualities without limit from himself. He has irresistible energy for all good undertakings. The sense is, that he cannot be thwarted by any obstacle.” See how great spiritual reformers have changed the lives of untold thousands, their influence reaching over the world and lasting even beyond their physical life span. So great is the virya of some saints that their mere touch can heal. Sometimes the clothing they have worn or objects they have touched heal the sick and work other miracles. Virya also manifests in the brahmachari’s words, giving
them a power not found in those of others. As Vyasa comments on this sutra: “From the attainment of virya, he draws out invincible good qualities from himself. And when perfected in it, he becomes able to confer knowledge on pupils.”

Through the accumulation of virya the powers of the mind develop beyond all bounds. Yogis have often displayed profound knowledge of subjects they had never studied, and on occasion have shown remarkable artistic abilities.

Virya affects the physical body, too. Swami Dayananda, the great Indian spiritual reformer of the nineteenth century, was once mocked by a man to whom he recommended brahmacharya for increase of bodily strength. When the man got into his horse-drawn chariot and told the driver to go on, the chariot would not move. The driver whipped the horses, but to no avail. In disgust and perplexity the man got out of the chariot and discovered Swami Dayananda holding on to its rear axle!

**Perfection in aparigraha**

“On non-possessiveness [aparigraha] being confirmed there arises knowledge of the ‘how’ and ‘wherefore’ of existence.” (Yoga Sutra 2:39) Regarding this Vyasa says: “What is this birth? How does it take place? What do we become [both in this life and after death], who shall we be and in what circumstances shall we be?” Any such desire of his to know his situation in former, later, and intermediate states is spontaneously gratified.” Nothing is more bewildering to the human being than his existence in this world—particularly the how and why of his even being here—no matter how much external philosophy in the form of books or teachers may attempt to answer the gnawing questions set forth by Vyasa. The reality of the situation is this: until the individual knows for himself by direct perception gained through his own development, life must remain a confusing mystery for him. Since the yogi is attempting to extricate himself from the bonds of birth and death, it is imperative for him to know the why and wherefore of human embodiment in all its
aspects. He does not need more theory, however plausible and appealing; he needs to know. This knowledge comes from within when all blocks to communication with his inmost consciousness are removed. For this birth has been determined solely by him in his nature as a potentially omniscient and omnipotent spirit. Perfection in non-possessiveness bestows the needed insight. “Since he has no attachment to outer possessions, illumination of the field of his own Self appears without effort on his part,” explains Shankara.

**Perfection in shaucha**

“From purity [shaucha] arises disgust for one’s own body and disinclination to come in physical contact with others.” (Yoga Sutra 2:40) This siddhi certainly will not be thought desirable in a body-and-sex-obsessed society that insists on being touched and hugged (and often more) by all and sundry, but the serious yogi should consider it carefully. After all, his intention is to disengage himself from the grinding gears of samsara—the chief of which is body-consciousness. Not only are human beings obsessed with their own bodies, they compound the problem by incessant contact with those of others. This contact results in the confusion and conflict of their personal energies (prana) by the invasion and admixture of other’s prana with theirs—particularly their psychic energies. Losing the integrity of their energies in this way, their life force become unbalanced, weakened, damaged, and—yes—defiled. This condition manifests as an endless series of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. “I am not myself” becomes a truism in relation to them. But for those who carefully observe shaucha it becomes otherwise.

“When by practicing purity and seeing the defects in the body, he becomes disgusted with his own body, he becomes free from obsession with the body; seeing what the body essentially is, he has no intercourse with others,” writes Vyasa. The disgust for the body spoken of here is not a hatred or an obsessive aversion for the body, but rather a
profound disillusionment with the body springing from awareness of
its many defects, not the least of which is its unreliability and inevitable
mortality. The body is also seen to be a repository of pain, disease and
filth, however fine the present momentary outer appearance may be. It
is in fact a treasury of death.

“With the ordinary purification of the physical body we become
more sensitive and begin to see things in their true light. Cleanliness
is mostly a matter of sensitiveness. What is intolerably disgusting to a
person of refined nature and habits is hardly noticed by another person
whose nature is coarse and insensitive. So this feeling of disgust towards
one’s own body which develops on its purification means nothing more
than that we have become sensitive enough to see things as they really
are.” So says I. K. Taimni.

Patanjali is not finished with the matter of shaucha. Since body and
mind are inextricably related, he continues: “From mental purity arises
purity of the inner nature, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, control of the
senses, and fitness for the vision of the Self.” (Yoga Sutra 2:41) Nobody
has objection to these, I am sure. When the inner bodies are pure they
are refined and fluid, capable of the most subtle practice of yoga and
reaching the highest states of consciousness. This state of inner purity
is particularly accomplished by thought and diet.

For the inwardly pure there is no need for artificial “positive think-
ing.” Cheerfulness and optimism rise up from within him as a matter
of course. And continue arising. Gone forever are mood swings and the
“ups and downs” of life. No more valleys or mountaintops: he soars in the
sunlit sky of the spirit as naturally as the eagle flies in the air. Whether
engaged in outer or inner activity, his mind is intent upon its purpose,
no longer scattered or flapping like a flag in the wind. One-pointed
meditation becomes effortless for him. No longer does he struggle with
the unruly senses and the mind which Krishna says are as hard to tame
as the wind. (Bhagavad Gita 6:34)
Perfection in santosha

“From contentment [santosha] he gains unsurpassed [superlative] happiness.” (Yoga Sutra 2:42) This is because santosha is a state completely free from all desire for objects or the compulsion to gain some outer thing not yet possessed. Such desire is itself great pain—as is usually its fulfillment. Taimni says: “There is a definite reason why superlative happiness abides in a perfectly calm and contented mind. A calm mind is able to reflect within itself the bliss [ananda] which is inherent in our real divine nature. The constant surging of desires prevents this bliss from manifesting itself in the mind. It is only when these desires are eliminated and the mind becomes perfectly calm that we know what true happiness is. This subtle and constant joy which is called sukha and which comes from within is independent of external circumstances and is really a reflection of ananda, one of the three fundamental aspects of the Self.”

Vyasa has this comment: “So it is said: ‘Whatever sex pleasure there may be in the world, whatever supreme happiness may be enjoyed in heaven, they cannot be accounted a sixteenth part of the happiness of destruction of craving.’” Simply being without compelling desires is great happiness and peace. Here is how the Taittiriya Upanishad expresses it:

“Who could live, who could breathe, if that blissful Self dwelt not within the lotus of the heart? He it is that gives joy.

“Of what nature is this joy?

“Consider the lot of a young man, noble, well-read, intelligent, strong, healthy, with all the wealth of the world at his command. Assume that he is happy, and measure his joy as one unit.

“One hundred times that joy is one unit of the joy of Gandharvas.

“One hundred times the joy of Gandharvas is one unit of the joy of celestial Gandharvas.

“One hundred times the joy of celestial Gandharvas is one unit of the joy of the Pitris in their paradise.
“One hundred times the joy of the Pitris in their paradise is one unit of the joy of the Devas.
“One hundred times the joy of the Devas is one unit of the joy of the karma Devas.
“One hundred times the joy of the karma Devas is one unit of the joy of the ruling Devas.
“One hundred times the joy of the ruling Devas is one unit of the joy of Indra.
“One hundred times the joy of Indra is one unit of the joy of Brihaspati.
“One hundred times the joy of Brihaspati is one unit of the joy of Prajapati.
“One hundred times the joy of Prajapati is one unit of the joy of Brahma: but no less joy than Brahma has the seer to whom the Self has been revealed, and who is without craving.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2:7,8)

Perfection in tapas
“Perfection of the sense-organs and body result after destruction of impurity by tapas.” (Yoga Sutra 2:43) Tapas is like the fire that refines gold through the burning out of all impurities. In relation to the body, tapas removes its limitations and defects. This has been shown by scientific studies: “Everyone around the water cooler knows that meditation reduces stress. But with the aid of advanced brain-scanning technology, researchers are beginning to show that meditation directly affects the function and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus and improve memory. One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain’s cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of twenty men and women who meditated
for just forty minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not…. What’s more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age.” (How to Get Smarter, One Breath At A Time, Lisa Takeuchi Cullen. Time, January 16, 2006, p. 93.) “There was a study reported at the American Geriatric Association convention in 1979 involving forty-seven participants whose average age was 52.5 years. It found that people who had been meditating more than seven years were approximately twelve years younger physiologically than those of the same chronological age who were not meditating.” (Gabriel Cousens, M.D., Conscious Eating, p. 281.)

The process is described by Vyasa as follows: “As tapas becomes complete, it destroys the veiling taint of impurity; when the veiling taint is removed, there are siddhis of the body like the ability to become minute, and siddhis of the senses in such forms as hearing and seeing things which are remote.” The body is no longer locked into its habitual patterns of size or location. Nor are the senses any longer limited to functioning within the bounds of proximity of objects. The body and senses become as free as the yogi’s spirit, and as expanded in their scope.

**Perfection in swadhyaya**

“From self-study [swadhyaya] arises communion with the beloved deity.” (Yoga Sutra 2:44) This sutra is not speaking of communion with God the Unmanifest Absolute, but with His manifested forms or with powerful beings–gods, realized Masters, and others who have evolved beyond the earth plane. “Gods, sages, and perfect beings to whom he is devoted come before the vision of the man intent on swadhyaya and give him their help,” says Vyasa. The help can be in the form of protection, removal of inner or outer obstacles, and even spiritual teaching. His aspiration expressed through swadhyaya and his love and admiration for them of which, through their omnipotence, they are ever aware, draw them to grant him encouragement, assistance, and instruction.
Perfection in Ishwarapranidhana

“Accomplishment of (or success or perfection in) samadhi arises from Ishwarapranidhana.” (Yoga Sutra 2:45) Though we can define samadhi in many accurate ways, when we think about it we realize that samadhi is totally coming to rest in spirit, the cessation of all else, and the centering of our being in God. Samadhi is entering into the heart of God, into the Silence that is the only truth. The perfection of that state is samadhi, which therefore is produced by total devotion of our life to God.

A final word on the subject from Vyasa: “The samadhi of one who has devoted [offered] his whole being to the Lord is perfect…. [By] the knowledge [resulting] from that [samadhi he] knows a thing as it really is.”

Self-realization: the goal

“This effulgent Self is to be realized within the lotus of the heart by continence, by steadfastness in truth, by meditation, and by super-conscious vision. Their impurities washed away, the seers realize him.” (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5)

And I. K. Taimni: “The student of yogic philosophy will see in these unusual developments which take place on practicing yama-niyama the tremendous possibilities which lie hidden in the apparently simple things of life. It appears that one has only to penetrate deeply into any manifestation of life to encounter the most fascinating mysteries and sources of power. Physical science which deals with the crudest manifestation of life touches the mere fringe of these mysteries and the results which it has achieved are little short of miraculous. There is, therefore, nothing to be surprised at in the fact that the yogi who dives into the far subtler phenomena of mind and consciousness finds still deeper mysteries and extraordinary powers.”
Afterword:

IT IS ALL UP TO YOU

All the theory and eulogy in the world regarding a meditation practice mean virtually nothing. But practice is everything. In meditation more than anything else, practice certainly does Make Perfect. And the practice is so marvelously simple.

Krishna told Arjuna: “One, perhaps, in thousands of men strives for perfection; and one perhaps, among the blessed ones, striving thus, knows Me in reality” (Bhagavad Gita 7:3). To enable each one of us to become “one in a million,” yoga was given by the sages to the human race. Its sacred methodology ensures that not a moment of our endeavor is wasted or ineffectual. Those who pursue the path of yoga unto the death of ignorance will be crowned with life. Those who cast aside the false life of the ego shall enter into the true life of the spirit.

Many have heard of the philosophy and practice of meditation, many have enjoyed lectures and books on the subject (some have even given the lectures and written the books), and yet have never taken up the practice to any degree. They simply did not make the connection between the beautiful theory and the actuality of their own lives. This is pretty much the trouble in all spiritual matters: people do not make the connection or transition from the theoretical to the practical. Consequently, as a friend I urge you in every sense of the expression to literally take this practice to heart.
It is essential in yoga, as in ordinary matters, to realize that all goes according to precise laws. Wishing, wanting, hoping, praying, believing—or their opposites—have no effect at all. When speaking of meditation, Patanjali says: “Its application is by stages” (Yoga Sutras 3:6). That is, meditation keeps moving onward in its effect when regularly practiced, just like the taking of a journey. It all goes in an exact sequence. Therefore we cannot expect that meditation will produce enlightenment in a random way like a slot machine in its payoffs. Meditation produces steady growth if there is steady practice.

The secret of success is regularity in meditation. “A diamond is a piece of coal that never gave up.” Paramhansa Yogananda formulated a more spiritual version: “A saint is a sinner who never gave up.” If you meditate regularly, every day, great will be the result. Water, though the softest substance known, can wear through the hardest stone by means of a steady dripping. In the old story of the tortoise and the hare, the tortoise won the race because he kept at it steadily, whereas the hare ran in spurts. He ran much faster then the tortoise, but the irregularity of his running made him lose the race. Meditation keeps moving onward in its effect when regularly practiced, producing steady growth through steady practice. The more we walk the farther we travel; the more we meditate the nearer and quicker we draw to the goal.

“Practice alone will show you where the truth lies,” said Ramana Maharshi. Yoga, the spiritual state, is produced by yoga the practice. Those who persevere in their yoga practice find unfailing and abundant happiness, peace, and fulfillment. Certainly the goal is not reached without much practice through the years, but every step of the way is blessed and brings rejoicing to the yogi’s heart. Then at last no more steps are needed, and he enters the ocean of Satchidananda. “A tiny bubble of laughter, I am become the Sea of Mirth Itself,” wrote Yogananda.

So it really is all up to you. The sane and sober voice of the Upanishadic Rishis assures us that through the simple japa and meditation of Om all possible spiritual attainments will be realized.
“He who knows Om need know nothing further,” declares the Mandukya Upanishad.

“Through Om the Lord is met face to face,” Shankara assures us in his Commentary on the Yoga Sutras. And in his commentary on the Taittiriya Upanishad: “Wishing to attain the supreme Self one does japa of Om; and he does indeed attain Brahman through that Om.”

The Mundaka Upanishad avers: “Om is the bridge to immortality. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness.”

The Mantra-Yoga-Samhita, verse 71, calls Om “the best of all mantras,” adding that all other mantras receive their power from it. And later in verse 73:

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.

Om.
As you can see, the amount of material in the authoritative scriptures of India and the words of realized saints regarding Om is truly surprising. Here I have arranged extracts from the previous sections to give an overview of the whole subject of the Pranava in its various aspects.

**Om is God (Brahman).**

“Om! This Syllable is Brahman” (Amritabindu Upanishad 20).

“Om is Brahman in one Syllable” (Amritanada Upanishad 20).

“This Syllable is the Parabrahman, which it designates…. This Syllable is the Supreme Brahman” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:2).

“That which is Om is the Pranava. That which is the Pranava is the All-pervasive One, the Endless One, the Deliverer, the Subtle One, the Pure One, the Shining One, the Parabrahman, the One Absolute Existence” (Atharvashira Upanishad 44).

“The innermost Fire, the esoteric Truth underlying the knowledge of Brahman, is Brahman. Om, the Monosyllable, is that Brahman. This is what has been said by the expounders of the Vedanta” (Brahmavidya Upanishad 1, 2).

“Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1).
“That [Om] is the quintessence of the essences, the Supreme, the highest” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.3).

“I will tell you briefly of that Goal which all the Vedas with one voice propound, which all the austerities speak of, and wishing for which people practice discipline: it is Om” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17).

“The Supreme Being is the most excellent Pranava that is taught in the Vedas” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 8:1).

“The one Syllable Om is Brahman” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 33: 1).

“Om is Brahman…. Om is the Supreme Truth. Om is all…. Salutation to him…. O Supreme,…Thou art Om” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 68:1, 2).

“Om is Brahman…. This alone is Brahman, the Brahma Pranava. This should be known…. As it alone is Brahman, this One-Lettered Brahman is shining always” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

“Brahman, the Self-Existent, says: ‘Om is my very life.’” (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 4).

“Brahman, indicated by Om, is Ishwara [God the Lord]” (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad Uttarakhanda 1).

“Brahman of absolute radiance and infinitude is identified with [one with] Om. The turiya-turiya of Brahman pervades the entire Pranava” (Rama Tapini Upanishad).

“Om is the Supreme Brahman” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7).

“The real nature of Brahman is identical with the Pranava” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8).

“God is the Syllable Om” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17).

“Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

“The Indivisible One Essence is the Syllable Om. The Indivisible One Essence is the japa of Om. Om is pure consciousness” (Tejobindu Upanishad 2:20; 6:42).

“The Single-Syllable [Ekakshara; Om] is the Parabrahman [Supreme God] himself” (Agni Purana).
“The gods, rishis, and the nagas, and the asuras, approaching Prajapati [the Creator], said to him: ‘Tell us the highest good.’ To them who were inquiring about the highest good, the Venerable One said, ‘Om, which is Brahman in a single Syllable.’” (Anugita XI. The Anugita is part of the Mahabharata and consists of teachings by Krishna.).

“The Venerable One said, ‘Om, which is Brahman in a single Syllable.’” (Ribhu Gita 17:40).

“The Venerable One said, ‘Om, which is Brahman in a single Syllable.’” (Ribhu Gita 24:21).

“The Venerable One said, ‘Om is the Truth that is indicated as ‘Om.’” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:30).

“The Venerable One said, ‘The monosyllable Om is the highest Brahman” (Manu Smriti 2:83, 87).

“The Venerable One said, ‘The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practiced austerity to realize the Sound-Brahman….By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol. That Brahman has been described by the Vedas as the ultimate goal” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 404).

“The Venerable One said, ‘It [Om] is not a word, it is God himself” (Swami Vivekananda, Inspired Talks, Sunday, July 21).

“The Venerable One said, ‘Yesterday a Hindu asked Bhagavan, ‘Is Omkara a name of Ishwara?’ Bhagavan said, ‘Omkara is Ishwara, Ishwara is Omkara. That means Omkara itself is the swarupam (the true form of God)” (Ramana Maharshi, Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, Suri Nagamma, p. 60).

“The Venerable One said, ‘Omkara itself is Brahman. That Brahman is the nameless and formless pure SAT [Reality]. It is That that is called Omkara” (Ramana Maharshi, Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, Suri Nagamma, p. 119).

“The Venerable One said, ‘Pranava alone is Ishwara” (Lahiri Mahasaya in his commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

“The Venerable One said, ‘All is he, the One pervading all, the One beyond all qualities. He is One, he is Om” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 88).
Om is both Saguna (With Qualities) and Nirguna (Without Qualities) Brahman

“Omkara is the higher as well as the lower Brahman,’ as the Sruti says” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:2. This statement is also found in the Maitri and Prashna Upanishads.).

“Om, indeed, is the lower Brahman; this is, indeed, the higher Brahman. Anyone who, meditating on Om, wishes either of the Two [aspects], by him that is attained. This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the higher and lesser Brahman” (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.16, 17).

“It is said: ‘This Syllable Om, verily, is the higher and lower Brahman.’” (Maitri Upanishad 6:5).

“That [Om] is of the form of the qualified [saguna] and the unqualified [nirguna] Atman” (Mandalabrahman Upanishad 2:4).

“Om is Brahman. Know that the mantra of the one-syllabled Om is Pranava…. It is saguna [with qualities] and nirguna [beyond all qualities]” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

“That which is the sound Om, O Satyakama, is verily the higher and the lower Brahman. Therefore, with this support alone does the wise man reach the one or the other” (Prashna Upanishad 5:2).

“Whether the unconditioned Brahman or the conditioned Brahman, the Syllable Om becomes a means of realizing it. For another scripture has it, ‘The Syllable Om is the higher and lower Brahman.’” (Prashna Upanishad 5:2) (Shankara, *Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*).

“Om is both the higher and the lesser Brahman” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Mandukya Karika*).

“Om is both Saguna and Nirguna [with attributes and without attributes], Sakara and Nirakara [with form and without form]” (Sivananda, *Meditation On Om*).

Om is the True Name of God

“The transcendent Brahman is indicated by Om” (Kundika Upanishad).

“Brahman is indicated by Om alone” (Yajnavalkya Upanishad).
“Om is the Name of the Supreme Lord” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Yoga Sutras*).

“Ishwara is the Atman as seen or grasped by mind. His highest name is Om” (Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, Sunday, July 21).

“Om is the highest Name of God, and comprises many other Names of God. It should be borne in mind that Om is the Name of God exclusively—and of no other object material or spiritual—while the others are but descriptive titles and not exactly proper names” (Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash*).

“The One Omkar is the True Name [of God]” (Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion. This is the opening line of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs.).

“Om—this is the sound that comes at the beginning of creation. The rishis were able to hear that sound. Even today, yogis hear it at the inner core of creation. There is no sound as pure as this in the whole world. It is the primordial Name of God.…Fix your mind on the sound Om, feeling that it is God himself” (Swami Premeshananda, *Go Forward*, pp. 245, 246).

**Om bestows the vision of God**

“Having made oneself the lower arani, and the Pranava the upper arani and rubbing them together through the practice of meditation, see the Lord in his hidden reality” (Brahma Upanishad 4).

“Though not seeing him [Brahman], you should see him through the word Om. This is the truth, is the Atman, is Brahman, for Brahman is the Atman. Indeed this is not to be doubted: Om is the Reality. That is what the wise see” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“As the form of fire when latent in its source is not seen and yet its seed is not destroyed, but may be seized again and again in its source by means of the drill [a pointed stick whirled to produce fire for the Vedic sacrifices], so it is in both cases. The Self has to be seized in the body by means of the Syllable Om. By making one’s body the lower friction stick and the Syllable Om the upper friction stick, by practicing the friction
of meditation one may see the hidden God, as it were” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:13, 14).

“That which is manifested by the Pranava is the Lord (Ishwara) himself….When the yogi has recognized the power of Om to express its meaning, the Lord, he should undertake japa and bhavanam of it on the Lord who is signified by Om. When the yogi thus engages in japa and bhavanam of Om, his mind becomes one-pointed. So it has been said: ‘After Om japa, let him set himself in yoga [bhavanam], after yoga, let him set himself to japa. When Om japa and bhavanam come to perfection the Supreme Self [Paramatman] shines forth.’” (Vyasa, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

“The underlying reality of nature, soul, and God is Brahman; but it (Brahman) is unseen, until we bring it out. It may be brought out by Pramantha or friction, just as we can produce fire by friction. The body is the lower piece of wood, Om is the pointed piece and Dhyana (meditation) is the friction. When this is used, that light which is the knowledge of Brahman will burst forth in the soul” (Swami Vivekananda, Inspired Talks, Sunday morning, July 7).

“If one repeats the Syllable Om, one can have the vision of God” (Swami Premeshananda, Go Forward, p. 233).

**Om unites us with God (Brahman).**

“That which causes all the pranas to prostrate themselves before and get merged in the Paramatman [the Supreme Soul: God], so as to attain identity with him, is for that reason known as the Pranava” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a).

“Pranava is the bow, the Atman is the arrow, and Brahman is the target. If aim be taken with due care, the arrow will become merged in the target of Brahman and become one with it” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad 14).

“The one Syllable Om is Brahman. Its use is for the union with the Paramatman who exists as the manifold universe” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 33: 1).
“Taking as the bow the great weapon of the Upanishads [Om], one should place in it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Drawing it with a mind engaged in the contemplation of That [Brahman], O beloved, know that Imperishable Brahman as the target. The Syllable Om is the bow: one’s Self, indeed, is the arrow. Brahman is spoken of as the target of that. It is to be hit without making a mistake. Thus one becomes united with it [Brahman] as the arrow becomes one with the target. He in whom the sky, the earth, and the interspace are woven, as also the mind along with all the pranas, know him alone as the one Self. Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality. Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore beyond darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6).

“One should make the Atman one with the Unborn by means of Om” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Om is the Atman himself. One who knows this has his jivatman merged in the Paramatman” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“That, the Immortal, the Real, is the target of the seeker. The bow is Om [the Tara], the arrow is the Atman, the center of the target is Brahman. The practitioner will become one with the target” (Rudrahridaya Upanishad 37).

“Om is the Supreme Brahman…. The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7).

“He who utters Om with the intention ‘I shall attain Brahman’ does verily attain Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1).

“The Pranava is like a bow furnished with an arrow, and the Supreme Brahman is the target to aim at. A man with all assiduity and calmness should shoot the arrow of his mind at this target of Brahman, so that like a shaft it might be driven into and kept fast and indivisible in the latter” (Agni Purana).

“The yogi who utters it [Om] attains identity with the deity” (Linga Purana 91:49b).
“The holy word, Om bestows the highest state” (*Yoga Vashishtha* 5:54).

“Just as the bow is the cause of the arrow’s hitting the target, so Om is the bow that brings about the soul’s entry into the Immutable. For the soul when purified by the repetition of Om gets fixed in Brahman with the help of Om without any hindrance, just as an arrow shot from a bow gets transfixed in the target” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Mundaka Upanishad*).

“Yogis who are engaged in both japa and bhavanam attain one-pointedness of mind. After japa, which causes his mind to bow before the Lord, let him engage in bhavanam. When his mind becomes unwavering from bhavanam on the Lord, let him do japa of Om, for japa leads to bhavanam. When japa and bhavanam of Om come to perfection then the Supreme Lord (Parameshwara), the Supreme Self (Paramatman) who stands in the highest place shines forth for the yogi” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Yoga Sutras*).

“Om is for the liberated living soul [jivanmukta]. When the body is destroyed he completely merges in Shiva undoubtedly. The repeater of the mantra [Om] certainly attains yogic communion with Shiva. A person who repeats the mantra [Om] certainly attains yogic communion” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:10-12).

“The yogi, by following in the trail of the sound Om, gradually merges himself in the Supreme Brahman” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 465.).

“It [Om] is all-pervasive and complete….So this is the Name of the Cosmic Being, and every time we utter it, we are lifted up, and we approach the infinite or Cosmic Mind….Every time we utter this, we shall feel the presence of that Highest, the omniscient Cosmic Mind, and those universal words are: ‘Om, Om.’…Our mind will be concentrated, and we shall come in direct communion with the cosmic Being.” (Swami Abhedananda, *Yoga Psychology*).
Om is eternal

“[Om is] the eternal Syllable of the Veda” (Rig Veda I.164.39).

“That sound arising from the heart, ‘Om’ of the Pranava, is eternal” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad 3).

“Om is the eternal” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 72).

“All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible Sphota, the manifest as Logos or Word. This eternal Sphota, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe… this Om and the eternal Sphota are inseparable;…the eternal Om” (Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti Yoga, The Mantra: Om: Word and Wisdom).

“The highest yoga is eternal bliss, the all-pervading Om, Pranava” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 114).

“The one Eternal Word is the prime cause of the universe” (Sri Anandamayi Ma).

Om is the Veda of Brahman-knowers

“Om is…the Veda which the knowers of Brahman know” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1).

“The threefold worlds and the entire Veda are comprised in Om” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 8:1).

“The Syllable Om encompasses and consists of …all the meters and hymns of the Vedas…. This is the essence of the Veda” (Tarasara Upanishad).

“Like an unbroken stream of oil and the long chiming of a bell is the resonance of the Pranava. That the high-souled ones saw of yore. He who knows that [Pranava] is the knower of the Veda” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 80, 81).

“The threefold Knowledge is based on the Omkara. It [Om] is another Triple Veda; he who knows that Om is truly learned in the Veda” (Manu Smriti 11:266).

“In the beginning the Pranava alone formed the Veda” (Srimad Bhagavatam).
“The sound of Om itself constitutes the Vedas. It is the light of divine wisdom, the fire of intuition” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 163).

**Om is the mantra by which we worship God and the gods**

“No arises the question, Why is the Pranava so called? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it causes pranama (obeisance) to be made to the Brahman of the Four Vedas” (Atharvashira Upanishad 46).

“One should adore the Immeasurable Power [God] through the Syllable Om” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:37).

“One should worship that immeasurable Power through the Syllable Om” (Maitrayana Upanishad 7:11b).

“One should continuously worship Brahman with the Syllable Om…. Therefore by the utterance of the Syllable Om all these forms [of Brahman] are praised, worshipped, and ascribed” (Maitri Upanishad 6:4, 5).

“With the Pranava consisting of bliss and immortality one should worship Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“This Atman, the highest Brahman, the Om sound, who shines as Turiya at the top of the Om sound, one should worship and encompass him in the word Om and meditate upon him” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“The yogi shall worship Maheshwara [“The Great Ishwara,” a title of Shiva], repeating the Pranava” (Linga Purana 91:71).

“The devotee should worship with the Syllable Om” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 16:110).

“Among words I am the Ekakshara [Om]; among sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25).

“How should one perform devotion to the Lord, and what is the means of that devotion? To explain the form in which the devotee contemplates on him, the sutra says: ‘His designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om].’ Of the Lord who has been described, the designating
The Glories and Powers of Om

Word is the Pranava…. The word Pranava is explained in the following way etymologically: *pra* stands for prakarshena: ‘perfectly;’ *nu* (from nava) means nuyate: ‘He is praised.’ Thus Pranava, the word Om, praises (pranauti) the Lord. That is, the Lord is devoutly worshipped (pranidhiyate) through it by his devotees. They bow down (pranam) to him through it. Through it they worship (pranidha) the Lord mentally; here the extra *dha* stands for the final [syllable] *va* of Pranava…. From the termination *ava* is understood avati: ‘He favors.’ He brings out his devotees from samsara, he leads those in samsara to nirvana, he brings to a devotee unsurpassed joy, he grants him samadhi to lead him to the highest truth. But all these meanings are associated with the most intense love of the Lord…. When the Lord is continuously worshipped in the mind by means of this Syllable, Om, he gives his grace…. Through Om the Lord is met face to face” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Yoga Sutras*).

“It is proper to employ Om as a means for practicing worship of God…. When the yogi has understood the identity of Om and Brahman he attracts the grace of the supreme Lord through its japa and bhavanam. Bhavanam is setting the heart on the Lord who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by it” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Yoga Sutras*).

“Repeating the Om continually is the only true worship. It is not a word, it is God himself” (Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, Sunday, July 21).

**Om, being God, should also be worshipped (revered).**

“In another place it is said: ‘The Word-Brahman is the Syllable Om; but the uppermost part of That is that which is composed [quiet], wordless….’ That is why one should worship these both.” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:22, 23).

“The Syllable Om is to be worshipped as consisting of Brahman, who is Satchidananda…. Because it delivers [saves], Om is called the Deliverer [Saving One: Taraka]. It should be known as the saving [delivering] Brahman which should be worshipped–mark this well.” (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).
“That which is Om is the indestructible, the supreme Brahman. That alone should be worshipped…. It is called Taraka because it enables one to cross this mundane existence [samsara]. Know that Taraka [Om] alone is Brahman and it alone should be worshipped…. He who knows this becomes immortal” (Tarasara Upanishad).

“Omkara is the holiest of holy things…. it is holy and full of sanctifying things. One shall worship Omkara devoid of sound, touch, color, taste and smell” (Vayu Purana).

“Just as the image of Vishnu or any other god is regarded as identical with that god (for purposes of worship), so is Om to be treated as Brahman” (Shankara, Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).

“The Syllable Om is the inmost essence of all essences. It is supreme because of its being the symbol of the Supreme Self. It is competent to be worshipped as the Supreme Self. It is competent to take the place of the Supreme Self since it is to be worshipped like the Supreme Self” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad).

“The Vedic rites are meant for the worship of the very Om because it is a symbol of the Supreme Self. The worship of That [Om] is surely the worship of the supreme Self” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad).

**Om is the abode of the “gods”**

“[Om is], the highest point upon which all the gods repose” (Rig Veda I.164.39).

“The one substance which is predicated by the term All, that is the source wherefrom all the gods and all the Vedas took their origin and wherein they attain final repose, which is firmly established in the four-fold state, is of the character of the Pranava” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a).

“All the gods enter Om, to be entirely absorbed therein” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 2:2, 3).

“Om is the single-syllabled mantra. The all-pervading Shiva is stationed in it” (Linga Purana 85:33).
Om IS all the gods

“Since all the gods enter Om, to be entirely absorbed therein, that Omkara is of the character of Vishnu. Since it causes all things apart from it to expand, by drawing them into its superabundance, it is Brahma” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 2:2, 3).

“Om becomes [seen as] the all-pervading Mahadeva [Shiva]” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 2:5).

“The one substance which is predicated by the term All, that is the source wherefrom all the gods and all the Vedas took their origin and wherein they attain final repose, which is firmly established in the fourfold state, is of the character of the Pranava” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a).

“All the gods take their origin from Om” (Dhyānabindu Upanishad 15, 16).

“Salutations unto Thee [Vishnu] who art the embodiment of Om” (Hayagriva Upanishad).

“He who is the exalted God Narasingha [Vishnu] is also Om; to him be salutations” (Narasingha Purva-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Salutations to that Om which is the true form of Rama, and is the foremost of the Vedas” (Rama Tapini Upanishad).

“The illustrious Rama, the exalted One, is Om: salutations to him” (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

“This Pranava is Indra, is everything that exists…. All is the Pranava. Indra is the movable and the immovable, so they say, but Indra is the Pranava…. Indra said: ‘What I am, the Pranava is; it is invoked as my form.’” (Shaunaka Upanishad).

“From the Pranava is generated Brahma; from the Pranava is generated Hari, from the Pranava is generated Rudra; the Pranava verily becomes the Transcendent [Para, or Highest]; the Pranava alone is manifest” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 77, 78).

“Om is the transcendent radiance wherein desire, action, and so also knowledge, inhere in a threefold manner as Brahma, Rudra, and Vishnu”
Om Yoga Meditation: Its Theory and Practice

(Yogachudamanya Upanishad 86).

“That mantra, made up of Shiva and Shakti [divine consciousness and Divine Power], is the Pranava…. This mantra is said to be the seat of divine consciousness, the sound form of Shiva that embodies his qualities” (Yogashikha Upanishad 2:5, 6).

“That transcendent radiance is Om in which there stand all the worlds and Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, all the worlds, all speech, and the Vedas” (Yogashikha Upanishad 6:56, 57).

“Rudra [Shiva] is expressible through the single Syllable, Om” (Linga Purana 17:63).

“The initial mantra of the Vedas is Om, the Pranava that expresses Shiva” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 14:14, 15).

“[Om] indicates Shiva and Shakti” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 10:20).

“Shiva is the Pranava and the Pranava is Shiva…. Rudra is that which is expressed by the single-syllabled Om” (Shiva Purana, Vayaviyasamhita 35:43, 46).

“Shiva is the Pranava and the Pranava is Shiva” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 3:5).

“Shiva is the Pranava and the Pranava is Shiva” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 3:5).

“She [Mahashakti] is known as Uma because She is the very essence of the sacred monosyllable Om….Since She exists as a ray of light in one who has been awakened by the contemplation of the subtle inner vibrations produced by the sound of Om, She is known as Indukala [ray of the moon]” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:2:84).

“From the same Om have come Om Shiva, Om Kali and Om Krishna” (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Majumdar translation: 5.13.1) By “Om Shiva, Om Kali and Om Krishna” is meant “Shiva who is Om, Kali who is Om, and Krishna who is Om.” Shiva, Kali, and Krishna are manifestations of the one Om, Satchidananda Brahman.

“The Shiva in the heart is steady, is One, is Omkar” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 93).
Om is the key to our spirit (Atman).

“He obtains wishes by singing [intoning], who knowing this, meditates on the Om. This, with regard to the Self” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.2.14).

“The Self [Atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12).

“On the great throne of one’s own heart one should install the Atman by means of Om” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Directly realize the Self by meditating on Om” (Vedantasara Upanishad 1).

“By the repetition of the Pranava the Turiya-Turiya Brahman flashes forth in the form of the non-relative Atman” (Yogashikha Upanishad 2:14).

“From the Pranava you will get illumination of the atma. Om and atma are closely connected” (Sri Anandamayi Ma, in Death Must Die by Ram Alexander).

“Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self” (Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramana Gita 3:10, 11, Ganapati Muni).

Om IS our spirit (Atman).

“It has been said elsewhere, ‘This Om is the sound form of this [Self].’” (Maitri Upanishad 6:5).

“The Self [Atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his Self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 1, 8, 12).

“Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6).

“The Atman of the four states and the Pranava are one” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

“Om is the Atman himself” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“The Pranava is the Atman” (Parabrahman Upanishad).
“‘I’ denotes Om…. I am that which consists of Consciousness [Chit], I am Om” (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

“‘I am that Om alone, having been freed from every other thing.’ This [realization] results from meditation on Om, as well as the knowledge of the nature of Brahman” (Shandilya Upanishad 6:32).

“Om is a single Syllable that is of the nature of the Self [atma]…. Om is the true form of the Self” (Tarasara Upanishad).

“I am the Self, identical with the mystic Om” (Agni Purana 358).

“The Pranava is the unchanging Atman that is all-pervasive” (Linga Purana 85:43).

“The Syllable ‘Om’ is the Self” (Ribhu Gita 10:22).

“Kabir says: Listen to the Word, the Truth, which is your essence” (Kabir).

“Remember the saying of the Vedas: ‘Om, this is Brahman; Om, this is the greatest reality; he who knows the secret of this Om, whatever he desires that he gets.’ Ay, therefore first know the secret of this Om, that you are the Om…” (Swami Vivekananda, The Vedanta).

“One Syllable shines for ever in the heart as the Self” (The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, sixth edition, p. 145).

“Omkar is the Atman, the eternal Self in you” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 87).

Om will be our guru

“Salutations to Dakshinamurti, who is pure and calm, the embodiment of pure knowledge and who is attainable through the Syllable Om” (Shankara, Hymn to Dakshinamurti).

“Receive that Word from which the universe springeth! That Word is the Guru; I have heard it, and become the disciple” (Kabir).

“The Word is the Guru, The Guru is the Word; within the Word immortality is found” (Guru Nanak).

“Om is your Sadguru. Om is your guide and preceptor. Therefore, keep company or constant satsanga with Om by practising japa of Om,
chanting of Om, smarana [remembrance] of Om, chintana [reflection] of Om, manana [continual thinking] of Om, vichara [inquiry into the nature] of Om, and meditation of Om” (Swami Sivananda, *Meditation on Om*).

“You will realize your identity with the Supreme Self through Pranava Sadhana. May you meditate on Om and attain the goal of life, the ultimate Reality. May this Om guide you. May this Om be your center, ideal, and goal!” (Swami Sivananda, *Japa Yoga*).

“Truth is not a religion, Truth cannot be taught. You must discover it in your own Self, and then let it expand in Om” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 96).

“The highest yoga is eternal bliss, the all-pervading Om, Pranava, the Universal Teacher, is eternal bliss” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 114).

**Om enables us to know both our Self and God, the Self of our Self**

“The Self [Atman] is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self [Supreme Spirit] with his Self [individual spirit]” (Mandukya Upanishad 1.8.12).

“In the nada [sound] of the Pranava is manifest Brahman, which is no other than the innermost Atman” (Nadabindu Upanishad, 51).

“Having experienced this one Om as immortal and ageless, and having brought about the Brahma-nature in this body, become convinced that your atma, associated with the three bodies [physical, astral, and causal], is Parabrahman…. This alone is Brahman, the Brahma Pranava. This should be known. There is no other Turiya [transcendent consciousness]…. It is the Atma Jyoti [Light of the Self]” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

“The Pranava is both the Atman and Brahman; they are united to each other” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

“So, in the culmination of the turiya-turiya Omkara, one actually perceives in one’s own Atman and with one’s own Self, the truth that
the unsurpassed state of the transcendent Brahman is the Atman alone” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

“That on which I have so long discoursed unto you, and which you have now realized in the two aspects of transcending the known, and transcending the unknown, and the unknowable, is verily 'this Brahman' which is non-dual and eternal. It is a peerless state of sentience and bliss. And that is the Atman, and that is the monosyllable Om” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

“[When the gods asked what the ascent to Brahman was, he replied:] This ascent alone is the Atman, as ascent is expressed by the japa of Om at the highest level of the turiya, which is identical with Brahman devoid of all attributes” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

“All this, verily, is Brahman, but Brahman is this Atman. While one makes this Atman one with Brahman by means of the word Om, and makes Brahman one with the Atman by means of the word Om, one should experience that one, ageless, immortal, fearless [One] in the word Om, should merge in it this whole threefold world, for one should know that the world consists of it, and should compress it [the world] in the word: Om. Thereby one should combine the threefold Atman and the threefold supreme Brahman into each other” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Woven lengthwise and crosswise [in the fabric of the cosmos] is the Om. Om is indeed speech [Vak]; and speech is this whole world. Therefore both the Atman and Om are one in the highest God” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Om is the Atman himself. One who knows this has his jivatman merged in the Paramatman” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“'I' denotes Om…. I am that which consists of Consciousness [Chit], I am Om. That is Ramabhadra, the supreme light. One should grasp the Atman in the word ‘I’ [Om] and should unite him in spirit with Brahman” (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

“By the practice at all times of the atma-mantra, Om, the highest Reality, the Transcendent Brahman, Sat-Chit-Ananda, the Immeasurable, the
Non-demonstrable which transcends the range of speech and thought, the Pure, the Subtle, the Aspectless, the Changeless, the Detached, the Endless, the Non-divisible, the peerless and imperishable Brahman manifests itself” (Yoga Tattva Upanishad [A] 1:69, 70; 2:5-14, 18, 19).

“[The yogi] shall not omit the practice of the Pranava mantra. While practising the Pranava he shall realize fully the identity of the jiva [individual spirit] with the supreme Brahman” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 13:34, 35).

“I shall now enter into the Self by the Self indicated by the culmination of the Om-sound–as a lamp without fuel” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:87).

“The one that is awakened is the inner Self, that is the supreme Self whose name is Om” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:2:48).

“Om is essentially the same as the Self….And the Supreme Brahman, too, is but Om….Om is the same as the supreme as well as the inferior Brahman…by virtue of its being a means for the attainment of Brahman” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad).

**Om is the source of creation and evolution**

“All the three worlds, with everything, animate and inanimate therein, take their origin from Om” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad 16).

“At the center of the wheel of creation is the Deliverer, the Syllable Om” (Narasingha Purva-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Like Brahman, Om encompasses everything. Om is particularly the glory of the Vedas. Everything, movable and immovable, has arisen from Om” (Pranava Upanishad).

“Om, the Pranava, is the image of Brahman. It is the Word of Power. From Om this world is projected, in Om it exists, and in Om it is involved during the cosmic Pralaya. Om is the essence of the four Vedas” (Shiva-Jnanamrita Upanishad 6).

“Pranava is of the nature of Prakriti [all creation], as is borne out by the scriptural statement, ‘knowers of Brahman say that the Pranava arises out of the Supreme Being as Prakriti.’ The Pranava is that by means
of which the universe is sustained” (Yogashikha Upanishad 2:13, 14).

“That transcendent radiance is Om in which there stand all the worlds
and Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, all the worlds, all speech, and the Vedas”
(Yogashikha Upanishad 6:56, 57).

“The Cosmic Spirit utters Om and by pure will creates the various
objects” (Yoga Vashishtha 3:67).

“All things are created by Om” (Kabir).

“From the word Om the Creation sprang” (Kabir).

“The goal of the universe is to realize oneness with the ‘Om’ or One
Existence” (Swami Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga, section III).

“In the universe, Brahma or Hiranyagarbha or the cosmic Mahat
first manifested himself as name, and then as form, i.e. as this universe.
All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands
the eternal inexpressible Sphota, the manifester as Logos or Word. This
eternal Sphota, 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 Sphota, and then evolves himself out
as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This Sphota 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 Sphota are inseparable; and therefore, it is out of this holiest
of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms, the eternal Om,
that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created” (Swami

“The one Eternal Word is the prime cause of the universe; with the
evolution of that ever-abiding Word, the progress of the material life of
creation goes on in parallel lines” (Sri Anandamayi Ma, from the Chapter
entitled “Thought Power” in Matri Darshan by J.C. Roy).

“The creation of the universe has come from the sound Om” (Swami
Premeshananda, Go Forward, p. 233).

“Om is All: the creator of the universe…. Let your devotion be steady
in this creator” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 120).
Om is the essence of the evolutionary solar energies

“That which glows [i.e., the sun] is Om” (Aitareya-Brahmana 5.32).

“Now, verily, Om is the yonder sun, for the sun is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1).

“Even as a great extending highway runs between two villages, this one and that yonder, even so the rays of the sun go to both these worlds, this one and that yonder. They start from the yonder sun and enter into the nadis [astral “nerves”]. They start from the nadis and enter into the yonder sun…. When a man departs from this body, then he goes upwards by these very rays or he goes up with the thought of Om. As his mind is failing, he goes to the sun. That, verily, is the gateway of the world, an entering in for the knowers, a shutting out for the non-knowers” (Chandogya Upanishad 8.6.2, 5).

“By means of Om he [the meditating yogi] sees the way, the way along which his prana goes; therefore one should always repeat it so that he goes along the right way: through the heart-gate, the air-gate, the gate which leads upward, and the opening of the gate of liberation which is known as the open orb [the sun.]” (Amritabindu Upanishad 25, 26) Those who continually invoke and meditate upon Om during their lifetime will remember Om at the time of death, and by means of Om will ascend to the sun and beyond into the real Beyond.

“‘It is said: ‘Indeed the sun is this Om;’ therefore one should meditate and make himself ready to unite himself with it” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:3).

“The sun is the form of Om” (Lahiri Mahasaya).

“The sun is Om to the Source” (Lahiri Mahasaya) To its (and our) very Source, the sun is Om. That is, the sun is “pure” Om.

Om encompasses and comprises all being and existence

“Verily, the Syllable Om is all this, yea, the Syllable Om is all this” (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3).

“Om: this Syllable is all this” (Mandukya Upanishad 1, 8, 12).
“The whole world [of relative existence] is composed of the Syllable Om, which absorbs all things into itself. To it be salutations again and again!” (Atharvashira Upanishad 44).

“Now arises the question, Why is it known as the All-pervasive One? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it pervades all the worlds, as their inseparable concomitant, even as oil would pervade the entire mass of pulverized sesame seeds, the source from which it has been separated, pervading the mass as intimately as the warp and the woof in a piece of cloth, for that reason it is known as the All-pervasive. (Atharvashira Upanishad 47).

“All the gods take their origin from Om. All the letters [of the alphabet] take their origin from Om. All the three worlds, with everything, animate and inanimate therein, take their origin from Om” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad 15, 16).

“The threefold worlds and the entire Veda are comprised in Om” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 8:1).

“Though the Brahma Pranava is one only, it is the substratum of all, the support of the whole universe, of the form of all letters, time, Vedas, and Shiva.” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).(In this instance, “Shiva” means the Supreme Brahman, not the “god” Shiva)

“The Syllable Om encompasses and consists of all—whatever belongs to the past, the present and the future, and consists of all the eternal verities, all mantras, all sounds, all the letters of the alphabet, the three hundred thirty million gods beginning from Brahman, all the meters and hymns of the Vedas, and the sixteen divisions of manifestation [kalas]. This is the essence of the Veda” (Tarasara Upanishad).

“The Omkara is identical with the three worlds, the three Vedas, the three sacrificial fires, the three steps of Vishnu, the three scriptures—the Rig, Saman, and Yajur Vedas. It should be known that they are really the Pranava…. Om represents the three worlds. Its head is heaven; all the worlds constitute its limbs; and its feet are Brahma-loka [the world of the Creator, Brahma]” (Linga Purana 91:49b, 55).
“Brahman is all as Omkara” (Ribhu Gita 17:40).

“The Omkar vibrates like a storm in the sky. It has neither beginning nor end. It is the stage manager of the divine drama. The body of man is a string of Om, it is filled with Om. All that is, inside us, outside us, everywhere, is born of Om. It is present in everything. The Shakti [Power] that is the Omkar is not finite, it is infinite and indivisible. It exists in all creatures. Pranava is Om. When Om unites with prana and moves in the body, this is Pranava. When nature and the subtle are separate, it is Pranava; when both are felt to be one, there is the Oneness: Om. Om is seen everywhere. The Shakti that is Om fills and penetrates the universe, it is formless, it is the light in all directions” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 95).

“The energy of the Omkar is like an infinite ocean, it moves in all directions, it pervades all, both inside and outside. In the form of buddhi it becomes creation, preservation, dissolution; it becomes soundless. The unstruck sound merges in buddhi. Buddhi dissolves in the Omkar, all merge and become one. Om and reason, the world and buddhi, the world and Om merge into the heart-sky, the heart-sky merges in buddhi, buddhi into akasha, akasha and buddhi into Omkar, the imperishable and the buddhi merge” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 96).

“Om is everything” (Ramana Maharshi, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 214).

“Om is everything. Om is the Name or symbol of God, Ishwara or Brahman. Om is your real Name. Om covers the whole threefold experience of man. Om stands for all the phenomenal worlds. From Om this sense-universe has been projected. The world exists in Om and dissolves in Om. ‘A’ represents the physical plane. ‘U’ represents the mental and astral plane, the world of intelligent spirits, all heavens. ‘M’ represents the whole deep sleep state, and all that is unknown even in your wakeful state, all that is beyond the reach of the intellect. Om represents all, Om is the basis of your life, thought and intelligence. Om is everything. All words which denote objects are centered in Om.
Hence, the whole world has come from Om, rests in Om, and dissolves in Om” (Swami Sivananda, *Japa Yoga*).

**Om is past, present, future, and eternity**

“All that is past, the present and the future, all this is only the Syllable Om. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the Syllable Om” (Mandukya Upanishad 1, 8, 12).

“Om! this Syllable is the whole world. Its explanation is as follows. The past, the present, and the future—all this is Om. And besides, what still lies beyond [these three modes of time], that also is Om” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Om! This Syllable is the whole world. Its explanation is as follows. The past, the present, and the future: all this is Om. And besides, what still lies beyond the three matras [or letters], that also is Om. All that, verily, is Brahman, and Brahman is the Atman” (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

“The Syllable Om encompasses and consists of all—whatever belongs to the past, the present and the future, and consists of all the eternal verities” (Tarasara Upanishad).

“Om is the eternal,…That which ever remains one through the revolutions of the past, the present, and the future” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 72).

**Om is protection**

“Remember Om, the Lord, the Protector” (Yajur Veda 40:15).

“Indra [king of the gods] said: ‘The Pranava will protect you…. Its greatness is superior to all and does not share in the greatness of others. The whole world rests on its greatness.’” (Shaunaka Upanishad).

**Om transmutes the body**

“Now arises the question, Why is the Omkara [Om] so called? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it
The Glories and Powers of Om

elevates, as it were, the entire body, for that reason it is known as the Omkara” (Atharvashira Upanishad 45).

“In this connection they cite the following passage: ‘But why is it [Om] called lightning-like? Because no sooner is it uttered than it illuminates [brightens up] the whole body like lightning.’” (Maitrayana Upanishad 7:11b).

“Now why is it [Om] said to be lightning? Because in the very moment of going forth [in repetition] it lights up the whole body” (Maitri Upanishad 7:11).

“Om is the transcendent radiance…. One should utter that by mouth, practice that with his body” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 87).

“Every time we utter this mystic Syllable Om, we feel the vibrations. It will change the whole structure and attitude of the mind, and the molecules of the body will begin to vibrate in a different way” (Swami Abhedananda, Yoga Psychology).

“It [Om] arouses and transforms every atom in his [the yogi’s] physical body, setting up new vibrations and conditions, and awakening the sleeping power of the body” (Swami Sivananda, Japa Yoga).

Om produces peace and harmony

“Only its [Om’s] knowers sit here in peace and concord” (Rig Veda I.164.39).

“By fixing the mind well and constantly on the Pranava, peace and tranquillity are attained” (Yoga Tattwa Upanishad).

“My heart is established in the peace indicated by the resonance of Om” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:87).

“He should repeat Om till the mind gains perfect peace” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:128).

“Whenever we are in distress or in a disturbed condition of our mind, or whenever anything unpleasant or any misfortune comes, and we do not find any comfort anywhere, if we repeat a few times that mystic Syllable ‘Om,’ the whole vibration will be changed, and we shall be uplifted” (Swami Abhedananda, Yoga Psychology).
“God manifests in the form of peace. Om is the form of peace” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 90).

“Om is All: the creator of the universe, the granter of peace. Let your devotion be steady in this creator, this giver of peace; this is the best devotion” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 120).

“Om is the City of Peace, the form of Peace. Give respect and gratitude to Om” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 151).

“Use your mind to get knowledge and then unite with peace, finally become one with Omkar” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 154).

Om grants liberation (moksha).

“Meditation on Om should be resorted to by seekers after liberation” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:2).

“The monosyllable Om, which is Brahman, should always be meditated upon by those who desire release from bondage…. The imperishable Pranava bestows release from bondage” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad 9, 17).

“He [the yogi] should utter the moksha mantra [Pranava, Om]” (Jabala Upanishad 4).

“Like a tortoise one draws in the limbs [of the senses] and locks up the mind in the heart by means of the repetition of Om. The knower of Yoga, having cut the thread [that binds to birth and death] with the knife of the Syllable Om does not become bound again” (Kshurika Upanishad).

“Just as a spider climbing up by its threads comes into free space, so also the one who meditates and ascends through the Syllable Om attains to freedom” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:22).

“He who knows that [Om] stands liberated” (Mandala Brahman Upanishad 2:4).

“Know that this Omkara is the atma that is indestructible during the three periods of time—past, present, and future—able to confer liberation and eulogized by the Vedas” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).
The Glories and Powers of Om

“To the aspirants after liberation, it is the support, like the sun, everywhere; it is the Atma Jyoti [Light of the Self]” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

“Liberation is not within the reach of any but the person who has developed the faculty of meditating on the Pranava” (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 26).

“The Pranava bestows liberation” (Varaha Upanishad 5:68).

“Om is the mantra of liberation and the essence of the Vedas” (Yajnavalkya Upanishad).

“By the mere knowledge of it [Om], a person will become a jivan-mukta” (Yogashikha Upanishad 2:7).

“He who meditates upon the imperishable supreme Brahman called Omkara leaves off the cycle of worldly existence. He becomes liberated from all ties and bondages” (Vayu Purana).

“Undoubtedly a Brahmin reaches the highest goal by japa of Om alone” (Manu Smriti 2:83, 87).

“The purport of prescribing meditation on the Pranava is this. The Pranava is Omkara…The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [moksha], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss” (The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, sixth edition, p. 25, 26).

Om liberates us at the time of death

“At the time of departure from this world, remember Om” (Yajur Veda 40:15).

“He shall receive instructions on the Pranava…. [At the end of his life] he shall discard his body remembering [reciting] the emancipating holy mantra, Om” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VII).

“Therefore, one who follows the way of life of the gods, he passes away in the Om sound, the highest Brahman. He sees in his Self the Highest Self [Paramatman], the highest Brahman” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).
“Then Satyakama, son of Shibi, asked him [the Rishi Pippalada]: ‘Venerable Sir, what world does he who meditates on Om until the end of his life, win by That?’ To him, he said: ‘If he meditates on the Supreme Being [Parampurusha] with the Syllable Om, he becomes one with the Light, the Sun. He is led to the world of Brahman. He sees the Person that dwells in the body, who is higher than the highest life….That the wise one attains, even by the mere sound Om as support, That which is tranquil, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme” (Prashna Upanishad 5:1, 5, 7).

“[The sage] has for his support the supportless Brahman alone, and this sage in the turiyatita state finally remains completely absorbed in the non-dual Atman alone…when he gives up his body with the sounding of the Pranava Mantra, Om” (Turinayita Avadhuta Upanishad).

“The man who, having subjugated his senses, repeats every day the Pranava Mantra, shakes off his mortal coil and is converted into the universal expanse of ether [akasha] which is but another manifestation of Parabrahman” (Agni Purana).

“Having confined the mind in the heart and…engaged in the practice of concentration, uttering the one-syllabled Om–the Brahman–and remembering me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the Supreme Goal” (Bhagavad Gita 8:12-14).

“The soul, when it departs from the body, goes upward by meditating on the Self with the help of Om as he did while living” (Shankara, Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad).

**Om delivers us from rebirth (samsara).**

“The gods connoted by the Pranava have considered Om to be that which helps in crossing [samsara], as Om enables [its invokers] in the surmounting of all the sorrows and fears of worldly existence which recur through several series of birth and deaths. Hence it is the Crosser [Tara]” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 2:1).

“Now arises the question, Why is it known as the Deliverer? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it helps
one to surmount and be delivered from the great fear of swirling in the recurrent confinement in the womb, birth, dotage, and death, for that reason it is known as the Deliverer” (Atharvashira Upanishad 49).

“It is necessary for all to meditate upon the Self [Atman]. Thus the aspirant after liberation should ever be uttering the Pranava which enables one to cross samsara, and be living as a jivanmukta” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VII).

“The samsara taraka [deliverer from samsara] is that Pranava which lifts one out of samsara” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

“He [Narayana: Vishnu] merged into one with the inner bliss, Brahman, the Purusha, the holy Syllable consisting of a, u, and m; and it became the sound Om. The yogi who has seen [experienced] this is free from birth and samsara” (Narayana Upanishad).

“I am the Pranava, which is the Deliverer [Taraka], the radiance of ‘I am He.’” (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 32).

“Because it delivers [saves], Om is called the Deliverer [Saving One: Taraka]. It should be known as the saving [delivering] Brahman which should be worshipped—mark this well. Because it saves from conception, birth, old age, death, samsara, and from the great fear, therefore it is called the Saving One. He who always remembers [through meditation and japa] this Saving One is saved by it from all sin, from all death, from samsara—from everything. He attains liberation, becomes great, and enters immortality” (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Om is the Supreme Brahman…. The knowers of Brahman by knowing what is therein [in the all-containing Om] become merged in Brahman, intent thereon [i.e., on Om] and freed from birth” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7).

“The knower of the real nature of Brahman that is identical with the Pranava, should cross all the formidable streams [of samsara] with the ferryboat of the Pranava” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8).

“The Pranava means an excellent boat to cross the ocean of worldly existence [samsara]. Or Pranava may mean ‘There is no world for you,’ or
it may mean ‘That which leads to salvation.’ Or it may mean ‘That which leads to new knowledge.’ After annihilating all actions [karmas] it gives the persons who repeat the mantra a fresh knowledge of the pure soul” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:4-8).

“The Brahmanas who know the Omkara are never born again” (Vayu Purana).

“By means of the boat of Om that is Brahman one crosses over [samsara, the ocean of birth and death]. The idea is that by controlling the senses through Om the enlightened person should cross over the currents of the river of transmigration with the help of that Om” (Shankara, Commentary on the Svetasvatara Upanishad).

“Pranava (Om) is a ferry-boat for men who have fallen into the never-ending ocean of mundane life. Many have crossed this ocean with the help of this ferry-boat. You can also do so if you meditate constantly on Om and live in the spirit of Om” (Swami Sivananda, Japa Yoga).

**Om conquers fear**

“One should concentrate one’s mind on Om, for Om is Brahman beyond fear. For a man, ever fixed in Brahman, there can be no fear anywhere” (Gaudapada, Mandukya Karika 25).

“One should concentrate the mind on Om, which is essentially the supreme Reality, for Om is Brahman beyond fear, because for one who is ever fixed in it, there can be no fear anywhere, in accordance with the Vedic text, ‘The enlightened man is not afraid of anything.’” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.9) (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika).

**Om contains—and confers—all states of consciousness**

“One should concentrate one’s mind on Om, for Om is Brahman beyond fear. For a man, ever fixed in Brahman, there can be no fear anywhere” (Gaudapada, Mandukya Karika 25).

“One should concentrate the mind on Om, which is essentially the supreme Reality, for Om is Brahman beyond fear, because for one who is ever fixed in it, there can be no fear anywhere, in accordance with the Vedic text, ‘The enlightened man is not afraid of anything.’” (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.9) (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika).
the presence or absence of the experiences of the waking, dreaming, and sleeping states.

“When [through japa and meditation] these three states, which are really divisions [manifestations or stages] of the Pranava, dissolve into each other—the grosser merging into the next succeeding subtler ones—the practitioner intent on achieving the attainment of the state of Turiya-Turiya will successfully achieve his end through this unity. Having become the self-luminous one, he becomes Brahman alone.

“This path of attaining the knowledge of the truth that the Turiya-Turiya is the peerless Brahman alone leads to victory. For this reason, this path of attaining the Turiya-Turiya, standing apart from all wrong paths, is resorted to for meditation on the Turiya-Turiya, and the accomplishment of nirvikalpa samadhi” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 3:1, 2).

“[The turiyatita state] is the Eternal, beyond the eternal and the transient; it is a pure mass of consciousness. In it there is no question of diversity. It is all, it is supreme blessedness and peace, it is beyond expression. It is purest Om. It is transcendent. It is supreme” (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:34).

**Om confers all true and worthwhile knowledge**

“Through it [Om] one knows what is to be known” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1).

“By this [Om] does the threefold knowledge proceed” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6-10).

“God is the Syllable Om, out of him proceeds the Supreme Knowledge” (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:17).

“The threefold Knowledge is based on the Omkara. It [Om] is another Triple Veda; he who knows that Om is truly learned in the Veda” (Manu Smriti 11:266).

“Ishwara [the Lord] said: O dear sons, recite this Om mantra which is identical with me. Your knowledge shall be stabilized” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 10:32, 33).
“Perfect knowledge consists of the meaning of the Pranava” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 14:9).

“[Through repetition of Om] all the revelations and inspirations will come, and we get the most wonderful results by the repetition of the Syllable” (Swami Abhedananda, *Yoga Psychology*).

Om bestows immortality

“One should meditate on Om…. This sound is that Syllable, the immortal, the fearless. Having entered this, the gods became immortal, fearless. He who knows it thus, praises this Syllable, takes refuge in that Syllable, in the immortal, fearless sound, and having entered it, he becomes immortal, even as the gods became immortal” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.4.1-5).

“Once students of sacred knowledge asked Yajnavalkya: Can we gain life eternal by japa? Yajnavalkya said: By the immortal Name one becomes immortal” (Jabala Upanishad 3).

“This [Om] is the bridge to immortality” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5).

“The Name designating the self-luminous Reality and consisting of the Syllable Om is hidden in the Vedas. By contemplating on the Supreme along with the japa of that Name one attains to immortality” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 12:8).

“It is said: ‘This [Om] is the way, this is immortality, this is communion and blessed happiness.‘” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:22).

“The yogi who is filled with Omkara becomes imperishable in the Imperishable Being” (Vayu Purana I.20.4).

“Because Om is the symbol of the Supreme Self it is the cause of immortality” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad*).

“Within the Word immortality is found” (Guru Nanak).

“Om is your best companion in life, because it gives you immortality and eternal bliss” (Swami Sivananda, *Divine Nectar*).
Om purifies us

“Om! This Syllable is Brahman…. With frequent application of this divine sound he washes away the stains of the soul” (Amritabindu Upanishad 20).

“The meditation on Om should not be discontinued. With this divine mantra one should meditate many times for ridding himself of his own impurities” (Amritanada Upanishad 20).

“From constant application to the nada [sound] of the Pranava, the impressions [samskaras] left by the past will be obliterated” (Nadabindu Upanishad, 49).

“[The aspirant] should take to the repetition of the Taraka-Nama, as it annihilates all sins. The Supreme Brahman shines in him who takes to this Taraka-Nama” (Sannyasa Upanishad).

“The Pranava [Om] burns away sins;…Hence the Pranava removes all obstacles and destroys all defects” (Varaha Upanishad 5:68, 71).

“He should utter as japa the Pranava [Om], for the purpose of destroying sins accumulated previously. The Pranava mantra removes all obstacles and destroys all defects” (Yoga Tattva Upanishad [A] 63, 64).

“Whether in a pure or impure state, he who utters the Pranava always is not smeared with sin, as the lotus leaf is not [wetted] with water” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 88).

“The Pranava shall be recited and repeated by those who desire all their sins annihilated” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:15).

“Japa of Om purifies the mind” (Shiva Purana [reference not noted]).

“If the devotee repeats the Pranava he becomes pure” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:18).

“By repeating the Pranava daily the devotee becomes perpetually pure” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:22).

Om removes all obstacles

“Pranava Sadhana consisting of the repetition of Om will remove all obstacles in the spiritual path” (Shiva-Jnanamrita Upanishad 9).
“The Pranava removes all obstacles” (Varaha Upanishad 5:71).
“The Pranava mantra removes all obstacles” (Yoga Tattva Upanishad [A] 64).
“From it [Om] comes the disappearance of obstacles” (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali).
“Let the practitioner [sadhaka], sitting in a retired place and restraining his senses, utter by inaudible repetition the Pranava [Om] in order to destroy all obstacles [to Self-realization]” (Shiva Samhita 3:48).

Om dissolves karma
“An adept in yoga who soars aloft upon the Swan [by meditating on Om] is not affected by karmic influences or by hundreds of millions of sins” (Nadabindu Upanishad, 31).
“Let the yogi destroy the multitude of karmas by the Pranava [Om]” (Shiva Samhita).

Om dispels ignorance and bestows knowledge
“By making his own inner sense [i.e., awareness] the lower arani and the Pranava the upper arani, the accomplished adept completely burns up and reduces to ashes his ignorance of the Atman” (Kaivalya Upanishad 11).
“One suffering from the ignorance of the Atman is cured by the Pranava. And it is the fruit of the meditation of the Pranava that one becomes the pure Atman. By meditating on the Pranava one should unite in the heart the jivatman and the Paramatman; then one leaves all scriptures and remains as consisting of the Paramatman. ‘I am Om!’—this is the state of samadhi; in this state one lets go of all duality and obtains nirvikalpa samadhi in which one remains without ‘I’ [the ego] and without ‘this’ [objective consciousness] as the pure Atman” (Pranava Upanishad).
“This is the Ultimate Word:…knowing it, the ignorant man becomes wise” (Kabir).
“Where the sound of Om is experienced there is no ignorance” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 46).

**Om is the supreme mantra**

“This [Om] is the best means [of attainment and realization]; this means is the higher and lesser Brahman. Meditating on Om, one becomes worthy of worship in the world of Brahman” (Katha Upanishad 1.2.15-17).

“It is said, ‘This Syllable indeed, is holy, this Syllable indeed is supreme.’” (Maitri Upanishad 6:4).

“Its [Om’s] greatness is superior to all and does not share in the greatness of others. The whole world rests on its greatness.” (Shaunaka Upanishad).

“When one says Om, all names and forms are contained in it; for the Pranava is everything and contains everything; therefore one calls it ‘the one Syllable [ekakshara].’…This sound grants victory and is constant and contains in it all beings; it is only a Syllable and yet infinite; being infinite it is one and contains all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Therefore they call the Pranava Indra. Verily, all syllables and all beings are linked with this one Syllable, all the Vedas and all the sacrifices are under its power. And just as everything is under Indra’s power, because he is the king above all, so everything is under the power of the Pranava; it is the king of all syllables” (Shaunaka Upanishad).

“That man is no other than the god Hari incarnate on earth, who fully understands the mystery of the mantra Om. Therefore it is incumbent on a man to constantly recite the mantra Om which heads the list of all its compeers in respect of merit and sanctity” (Agni Purana).

“The Vedas are founded upon the Pranava. They begin with it, which should be regarded as the summum bonum of speech. Therefore, you should all repeat that sacred Syllable Om” (Agni Purana).

“Brahman is the only knowledge, and this mystic Syllable is his only exponent. The man who has fully understood the import of this monosyllable, has attained everything worth obtaining” (Agni Purana).
“Om is the divine order, the supreme cause, truth, bliss, amrita, the supreme Brahman, greater than the greatest” (Linga Purana 17:63).

“The two sets of created beings–nama [name] and rupa [form]–are pervaded by this mantra. It indicates Shiva and Shakti. The entire set of Vedas and crores [tens of millions] of mantras were formed of that. Different things are achieved through different mantras, but everything is achieved through Omkara alone. By this root-mantra [mulamantra] enjoyment as well as salvation is achieved” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 10:20, 23, 24).

“To understand the meaning of the Pranava is to understand me [says Shiva]. The Pranava is the seed of all the lores. It shall be understood as very subtle but possessed of great meaning even as the seed of the banyan tree though very small contains a huge tree. It is the initial mantra and the essence of the Vedas. Particularly it has me [Shiva] for its form. I am Shiva pervading all but stationed in the single-syllabled mantra Om. Whatever object there is, whether synthesized into one or analyzed in parts, is the meaning of the Pranava. It is the imperishable Brahman, the means of attaining all objects. Shiva creates the universe at the outset, saying ‘Om.’ Shiva is the Pranava and the Pranava is Shiva. The brahmin sages, the wise who realize the identity between the word and what it indicates know me as the single-syllabled Om. Hence he who aspires for salvation and is free from aberration shall understand the Pranava as the cause of all, and me as the Nirguna Parameshwara. I give this crest-jewel of mantras at Kashi for the liberation of all individual souls” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 3:2-10).

“Om is the expresser of the Paramatman [the Supreme Self]. It shall be known as the great mantra [mahamantra] by the expert sages. This great mantra is subtle” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 16:38, 39).

“Om, being so important, should be used as a means to Self-realization. If it is used as a means to realization, the entire Vedas are practically used” (Shankara, Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).
“One should meditate on the Syllable Om. This Syllable, Om, as the Name of the Supreme Reality, is nearest to him; when it is used he surely becomes gracious just as a man becomes so when his favorite name is used…. It is a symbol [indicator] of the Supreme Self (Paramatma). Thus it is known in all the Upanishads that Om, as a name and as a symbol, holds the highest position of being an aid to the meditation of the Supreme Self…. The Syllable Om is the inmost essence of all essences. It is supreme because of its being the symbol of the Supreme Self. It is competent to be worshipped as the Supreme Self. It is competent to take the place of the Supreme Self since it is to be worshipped like the Supreme Self” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Chandogya Upanishad*).

“Om being beyond measures is Turiya, it has infinite dimension and its extent cannot be determined. It is auspicious and holy because of the negation of all duality. He who knows Om is a sage because of his meditating on the Supreme Reality, and not any other man, though he may be learned in the scriptures” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Mandukya Karika*).

“Om is the greatest [mantra], meaning the Absolute” (Swami Vivekananda, *The Four Paths of Yoga*).

“Om is the only symbol for that Immortal, All-pervading Self. Think of Om to the exclusion of everything. Repeat Om mentally” (Sivananda, *Japa Yoga*).

“A bija-akshara is a seed letter. It is a very powerful mantra. The greatest of all bija-aksharas is Om or Pranava, for it is the symbol of the Para-Brahman or the Paramatman himself. Om contains within itself all the other bija-aksharas. Om is the general ground or the common seed from which all the particular sounds or secondary seeds proceed. The letters of the alphabet are only emanations from Om which is the root of all sounds and letters…. There is no mantra superior to or greater than Om” (Sivananda, *Japa Yoga*).
Om should be the object/subject of our meditation

“The meditation on Om should not be discontinued. With this divine mantra one should meditate many times” (Amritanada Upanishad 20).

“One should meditate on this Syllable [Om]” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.1).

“The monosyllable Om, which is Brahman, should always be meditated upon by those who desire release from bondage” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad 9, 17).

“The Single Lettered Syllable [Om] should be contemplated upon as Brahman by all who aspire for emancipation…. He who does not know Omkara is not a Brahmin” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad).

“Practicing meditation, one should apply himself to the best of his strength to the resonance of the sound of Omkara” (Dhyanabindu Upanishad).

“It [Om] should be meditated upon” (Jabala Upanishad 3, 4).

“By means of Om the yogi should concentrate his thought on the Supreme Self. This Syllable Om verily is the substance of many great upanishads and a secret guarded by the gods without imparting to the unqualified. He who practices meditation on the Supreme thus with the aid of the Pranava attains to the unlimited greatness of the Supreme. By that [Om] he attains to the greatness of Brahman. Thus the secret knowledge has been imparted” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 80:18).

“One should meditate with the Syllable Om on that Unlimited Splendor [that is God]” (Maitri Upanishad 6:37).

“Verily, the nature of the ether within the space [of the heart] is the same as the Syllable Om. With this Syllable, indeed, that rises up, goes upward and pours forth. Verily, it becomes for ever the support of the meditation on Brahman…. Therefore one should meditate with the Syllable Om, that boundless Light” (Maitri Upanishad 7:11).

“Meditate on Om as the Self. May you be successful in crossing over to the farther shore of darkness” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).
“One who concentrates his mind on the Pranava and its import experiences the internal radiance that alone is the real form of the Pranava” (Mandalabrahman Upanishad 2.2.1).

“He should ever be intent upon the realization, through meditation, of the Brahma Pranava [the Pranava that is Brahman]” (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VII).

“This Atman, the highest Brahman, the Om sound, who shines as Turiya at the top of the Om sound, one should meditate upon through the Pranava and make himself one with Brahman” (Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad).

“Now I shall describe the Yogashikha which is by far superior to all forms of jnana [knowledge]. Assuming any posture deemed suitable by the practitioner, and withdrawing the mind from everywhere, one should contemplate upon Om instead” (Yogashikha Upanishad 1:69, 70).

“[Shiva said:] Recite the mantra Om to acquire knowledge of me. I have taught this great auspicious mantra. Omkara came out of my mouth. Originally it indicated me. It is the indicator and I am the indicated. This mantra is identical with me. The repetition of this mantra is verily my repeated remembrance” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 10:15-17).

“The bhavana [meditation] of Omkara is the japa that gives happiness” (Ribhu Gita 34:8).

“Ishwara is the Atman as seen or grasped by mind. His highest name is Om; so repeat it, meditate on it” (Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, Sunday, July 21).

“While perceiving the sound of Pranava, it alone is meditated upon as Ishwara” (Lahiri Mahasaya in his commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

**Om is the foremost object of meditation**

“The sages Angiras and Sanatkumara asked the renowned sage Atharvan: ‘Which is the form of meditation that came to be foremostly employed by seekers after liberation? What should be the object of
meditation by such seekers?’ Atharvan replied: ‘The form of meditation that came to manifest as the foremost of all, for the regeneration of all seekers, was the First Word, indicative of Brahman: the Syllable Om.’” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:1).

“Dismiss other utterances. This [Om] is the bridge to immortality” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5).

“Being the root of all mantras, and being the form of the primal being, it is known as the mula [root] mantra” (Yogashikha Upanishad 2:5-11).

“[Om is] the best of all mantras” (Mantra-Yoga Samhita 71).

“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” (Mantra-Yoga Samhita 73).

“The monosyllable Om is the highest Brahman….Undoubtedly a Brahmin reaches the highest goal by japa of Om alone, whether he performs other rites or neglects them” (Manu Smriti 2:83, 87).

“The monosyllable Om is the supreme Brahman….All religious acts ordained in the Veda perish; but the Syllable Om must be known to be imperishable, as it is identical with Brahman, the Lord of Creation….The Four Daily Sacrifices [offerings made to God, gods, men, and animals], together with the sacrifices prescribed [in the Veda], all put together are not equal to a sixteenth part of the offering performed by reciting Om. A Brahmin may beyond doubt obtain final emancipation by solely repeating Om, whether he perform any other religious observance or not” (Vishnu Smriti 55) The identical passage is to be found in the second section of the Manu Smriti, as well.

“Ishwara [God] is a particular Purusha [Spirit, Person] who is untouched by the afflictions of life, actions, and the results and impressions produced by these actions. In him is the highest limit of omniscience. [“In him becomes infinite that all-knowingness which in others is only a germ”–Swami Vivekananda’s translation.] Being unconditioned by
time he is teacher even of the ancients. His designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om]. [“His manifesting word is Om”—Swami Vivekananda’s translation.] Its japa [constant repetition] and bhavanam is the way [or: should be done]. From it result [come] the disappearance of obstacles and the turning inward of consciousness. Disease, languor, doubt, carelessness, laziness, worldly-mindedness, delusion, non-achievement of a stage, instability, these cause the distraction of the mind and they are the obstacles. [Mental] pain, despair, nervousness, and agitation are the symptoms of a distracted condition of mind. For removing these obstacles [there should be] the constant practice of the one principle [the japa and bhavanam of Om]” (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali 24-32).

“Having known Om, one should not think of anything whatsoever [but Om]” (Gaudapada, Mandukya Karika 24).

“Om is surely the lower Brahman; and Om is considered to be the higher Brahman. Om is without cause, and without inside and outside; and it is undecaying. Om is indeed the beginning, middle, and end—everything. Having known this way indeed one attains immediately. One should know Om to be God seated in the hearts of all. Meditating on the all-pervasive Om, the intelligent man grieves no more. The Om, without measures and possessed of infinite dimension, is the auspicious entity where all duality ceases. He by whom Om is known, is the real sage, and not so is any other man” (Gaudapada, Mandukya Karika 24, 26-29).

“When the Syllable Om is known, one should not think of anything whatsoever, serving any seen or unseen purpose; for he has got all his desires fulfilled” (Shankara, Commentary on the Mandukya Karika).

“Om is used to serve as a means to the meditation on Brahman. As other scriptures say, ‘This is the best help (to the realization of Brahman) and the highest.’…‘One should concentrate on the Self, uttering Om.’ (Mahanarayan Upanishad 24:1) ‘One should meditate upon the Supreme Being only through the Syllable Om.’ (Prashna Upanishad 5:5) ‘Meditate upon the Self with the help of the Syllable Om.’ (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6) And so on. Although the words ‘Brahman,’ ‘Atman,’
etc. are names of Brahman, yet on the authority of the scriptures we know that Om is its most intimate appellation. Therefore it is the best means for the realization of Brahman” (Shankara, *Commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*).

“Following the path of discrimination, let the pure mind be firmly fixed in Om” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 12).

“Devotion, reflection, power, all three merge and become Om. The ego melts into the Omkar like camphor melts in fire” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, *Nitya Sutra* 160).

“This mantra represents both the manifest and the unmanifest aspects of God. Om is the first sound wave that rose from the Unmanifest and is the cause of the universal manifestation—creation, preservation, and dissolution. There are many who repeat only Om, still their minds, and realize the primeval Source of all manifestation. Through Om they reach the absolute, unmanifest Truth” (Swami Ramdas).

“Japa is repeating the Holy Name; through this the devotee rises to the Infinite. This boat of sacrifice and ceremonies is very frail, we need more than that to know Brahman, which alone is freedom. Liberty is nothing more than destruction of ignorance, and that can only go when we know Brahman. It is not necessary to go through all these ceremonials to reach the meaning of the Vedanta. Repeating Om is enough” (Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, Monday, July 8).

“Do japa of Om, understanding and feeling its significance. Om is Sat-Chit-Ananda. Om is Infinite. Om is Immortality. Sing Om. Meditate on Om. You will attain Self-realization” (Sivananda, *Ananda Gita*).

“As the various devatas are the aspects or forms of the One Supreme Being, so the various bija-aksharas or bija-mantras are so many aspects or forms of the Supreme Bija or Mantra, viz., Om” (Sivananda, *Japa Yoga*).

**Om should always be repeated**

“Then he should meditate [on Om] and utter it repeatedly, more than repeatedly; for no excess here is too much” (Amritabindu Upanishad 21).
“There is no time limit on the meditation and japa of the Pranava, but rather this should be continued until one casts off one’s body” (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

“[The aspirant] shall devote himself all the time to meditation on Brahman and the Pranava, and this way attain liberation, the state of a jivanmukta even while alive” (Sannyasa Upanishad).

“[The sage’s] inner possession is Om, the Pranava. Till his final breath is out, he shall not abandon it” (Satyayani Upanishad).

“One should utter that by mouth, practice that with his body, and should utter that mentally, every day” (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 87).

“It is incumbent on a man to constantly recite the mantra Om which heads the list of all its compeers in respect of merit and sanctity” (Agni Purana).

“[To attain the realm (state) of Shiva], the devotee should repeat the Pranava mantra every day” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 11:36).

“By repeating the Pranava daily the devotee becomes perpetually pure” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:22).

Om should be intoned in time with the breath

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.1.6).

“The breath is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3).

“With Om alone he should breathe” (Amritabindu Upanishad 20).

“Because in this manner he joins the breath, the Syllable Om, and all this in its manifoldness therefore this is called Yoga [joining]. The oneness of the breath, the mind, and likewise of the senses [through japa of Om with the breath] and the abandonment of all conditions of existence, this is designated as Yoga. One draws in the pranas by means of the Syllable Om” (Maitri Upanishad 6:22-26).

“In the breathing, that [Om] has its place in the heart that casts forth light. In the breathing that [Om] is like the action of smoke; for
when there is motion of air the smoke rises to the sky in one column and follows afterward one branch after another. That is like throwing salt into water, like heat in melting butter” (Maitri Upanishad 7:11).

“[Remembrance of the Pranava] must become so automatic that you cannot breathe without remembering it” (Sri Anandamayi Ma, in Death Must Die by Ram Alexander).

“The breath of Omkar should be inside you, then there is purity” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 124).

“The Omkar should be drawn inside with the breath like water is drawn up from a well. And like the pot is let down into the well for a fresh fill, so the exhalation should be released with Om” (Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa, Nitya Sutra 161).

“Chant ‘Om’ with every breath” (Swami Rama Tirtha).

“The more you practice [repetition of Om joined with the breath] the calmer you will be. Just think of ‘Om’ and you can practice even while you are sitting at your work. You will be all the better for it” (Swami Vivekananda, Raja Yoga, Chapter Five).

**Om is (and accomplishes) the highest pranayama**

“The sacred Syllable sounds silently [within during meditation]. With this ‘sound’ he [the meditating yogi] sees the way, the way along which his prana goes. Therefore one should always practice it, so that he goes along the right way” (Amritabindu Upanishad, 24).

“By means of Om he [the meditating yogi] sees the way, the way along which his prana goes; therefore one should always repeat it so that he goes along the right way: through the heart-gate, the air-gate, the gate which leads upward, and the opening of the gate of liberation which is known as the open orb [the sun.]” (Amritabindu Upanishad 25, 26).

“That which causes all the pranas to prostrate themselves before and get merged in the Paramatman [the Supreme Soul: God], so as to attain identity with him, is for that reason known as the Pranava. The one substance which is predicated by the term All, that is the source wherefrom
all the gods and all the Vedas took their origin and wherein they attain final repose, which is firmly established in the four-fold state, is of the character of the Pranava” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a).

“Pranayama is composed of the Pranava, Om. [Therefore] he should repeat the Pranava mentally. This only will be pranayama” (Darshan Upanishad 6:2, 5, 6).

“Because in this manner he joins the breath, the Syllable Om, and all this in its manifoldness therefore this is called Yoga [joining]. The oneness of the breath, the mind, and likewise of the senses [through japa of Om with the breath] and the abandonment of all conditions of existence, this is designated as Yoga. One draws in the pranas by means of the Syllable Om” (Maitri Upanishad 6:22-26).

“Pranayama is accomplished through concentrating the mind on Om” (Saubhagyalakshmi Upanishad).

“The Pranava alone becomes the pranayama” (Shandilya Upanishad 6:2).

“Pranayama is accomplished through the right realization of the true nature of the sound which is at the extreme end of the pronunciation of the Syllable Om, when sushupti [the dreamless sleep state] is rightly cognized [experienced] while conscious” (Shandilya Upanishad).

“The Pranava is the vital breath of all living beings from Brahma [the Creator] to the immobile beings [such as plants and minerals]. Being the Prana thus, it is called Pranava. That is Om…. Bindu and Nada cannot be described directly, but are known only by the wise…. I am the source of the Vedas. Pranava expresses me. Since it expresses me the Pranava, too, is known as the source of the Vedas…. ‘Om is everything, everything is Brahman.’ This Vedic Text establishes the link between the Word and its meaning…. The link of the jiva and the Atman with me and the Pranava is as between the word and its sense” (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 3:14, 15, 18, 20, 33, 37,).

“Pranayama is accomplished by effortlessly breathing and joining to it the repetition of the sacred Om with the experience of its meaning,
when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state” (*Yoga Vashishtha* 5:78).

**Om is the Sound that leads to Silence**

“The wise mounts the chariot of Om,…. But the chariot is useful only so long as one is on the highroad; he who has come to the end of the highroad leaves the chariot and goes on foot. So one leaves the word-symbol also, and only with the silent Om one comes to the soundless, silent, invisible place” (Amritabindu Upanishad 2-4).

“The sacred Syllable sounds silently [within during meditation]. With this ‘sound’ he [the meditating yogi] sees the way, the way along which his prana goes. Therefore should one always practice it, so that he goes along the right way” (Amritabindu Upanishad, 24).

“Mounting on the chariot of Om, one seeking a place in the Brahmaloka should drive in the chariot as long as the way is on the track of the chariot and halting at the end of the track, he proceeds onward, giving up the chariot. Then abandoning the stages of matra [letters] and linga [form, mode], devoid of vowels and consonants, he reaches the subtle stage by means of the [subtle] sound” (Amritanada Upanishad 2-4).

“Beginning the Yoga with Om, meditate wordlessly on the highest one, since through wordless meditation Brahman is being attained” (Brahmabindu Upanishad 7).

“Brahman is the Syllable of Om; when it fades off, what remains the wise, the seekers of peace of soul, meditate upon–that eternal One” (Brahmabindu Upanishad 16).

“Even as the sound of a bell cast of bell-metal finally dissolves itself for attaining peaceful silence, similarly should the Om be turned into account by the yogi aiming at the attainment of the all, for his final repose. Wherein the sound of the Om attains its final dissolution, thereafter is Brahman perceived. That yogi who dissolves his inner sense [mind] along with the sound of the Pranava makes for that immortal state of
becoming one with Brahman, by giving up the delusion of existence apart from the Atman” (Brahmavidya Upanishad 12, 13).

“The end of the Pranava is That which transcends all” (Brahmavidya Upanishad 72).

“The Syllable Om is dissolved in the primal cause during contemplation” (Mahanarayan Upanishad 12:17).

“It is said: ‘Indeed, two Brahmans are to be contemplated: the Word and the Non-Word. For through the Word is the Wordless made manifest.’ Here the Word signifies the Syllable Om. Ascending through this, one attains to the wordless or the non-word, to Nirvana” (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:22).

“The lotus flower that occupies the space in the heart is the seat of the mind. With the sound of Om it becomes luminous, opens out, resounds, and is silent” (Yoga Tattva Upanishad 8).

“I abandon all thoughts and notions; contemplating Om, I shall remain in the Self, in total inner silence” (Yoga Vashishtha 5:81).

“Om is the root of all sounds. Every other sound is contained in That, and it is used to take one beyond all sound” (Sri Anandamayi Ma, in Death Must Die by Ram Alexander).

“Maunam [silence] is the state of Shakti [power] that emerges from within as Ekakshara [Om]” (Sri Ramana Reminiscences, G.V. Subbaramayya, p. 149).

The idea behind all these quotations is not that after some time in meditation we simply sit, silent and blank, but rather that the inner intonations of Om become increasingly subtle until they pass beyond sound into an actual silent form—not the mere cessation of repetition—that is the state (stithi) of Om, from which all sounds arise: the bhava of Om.

**Om leads to samadhi**

“A man is firmly established in spiritual life when he goes into samadhi on uttering ‘Om’ only once” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, The Gospel of
Om Yoga Meditation: Its Theory and Practice

Sri Ramakrishna, p. 586. The Majumdar translation (4.21.5) is: “When one goes into samadhi after uttering Om once, then one is secure.”

“One attains samadhi by piercing nada (the sound barrier). The nada is pierced through repetition of Om and one attains samadhi” (Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Majumdar translation: 3.4.2).

“Sound is very easy for the mind to concentrate upon. As soon as the mind is absorbed in it, we rise higher into a state of superconsciousness. It is said in the scriptures that Brahman revealed itself originally as sound and the first sound was Om. Therefore Om is the nearest symbol of God for helping the concentration of the mind and leading to the realization of Brahman. Om is the Shabda-Brahman [Brahman as Sound], the Brahman which is beyond sound, but which can be attained through sound” (Swami Ramdas).

Om transforms us into divinity

“This Om is the highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, meditates on Om, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this Om to Udara Shandilya, he also said: ‘As long as they shall know this Om among your descendants, so long their life in this world will be the highest and best.’ And so will their state in that other world be. One who thus knows and meditates—his life in this world becomes the highest and best, and so his state in that other world, yea, in that other world.” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.2-4) (“Highest and best” is an upanishadic title for God.).

“This knower of Om in this manner becomes the transcendent Isha or Shiva who alone is exclusively worthy of being meditated upon, and also becomes one who brings about the well-being of all his devotees. Hence one should give up all things apart from Brahman That is without a support, and devote himself entirely unto the attainment of Brahman [through Om]” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 3:4c).
“That man is no other than the god Hari incarnate on earth, who fully understands the mystery of the mantra Om” (Agni Purana).

“The yogi who identifies himself with Omkara shall merge himself in imperishable Being. He shall thus himself become imperishable” (Linga Purana 91:45).

“The yogi that becomes identical with Om becomes identical with the imperishable Being. Pranava is the bow, the Atman is the arrow, and Brahman is the target. It [Brahman] should be pierced [entered into] by one who does not err. He shall be concentrated therein as in regard to the arrow” (Linga Purana 91:49a).

“A mahayogi who performs japa and bhavanam perpetually of Shiva in the form of the Pranava, certainly becomes Shiva himself” (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhitā 17:26).

“The yogi who is filled with Omkara becomes imperishable in the Imperishable Being” (Vayu Purana I.20.4).

“Just as light is the property of a lighted lamp, so the sound of Om is the intrinsic property of the stage of samadhi” (Lahiri Mahasaya in his commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

**Om japa and meditation is the sum and substance of yoga**

In the second section of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali says: “Kriya Yoga is comprised of spiritual practice [tapasya], self-study [swadhyaya], and the offering of one’s life to God [Ishwarapranidhana].” Commenting on this, Yogiraj Sri Sri Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahasaya wrote: “Constant japa of the Pranava, Omkar, which is self-revealing, and constant focus on it as the form of Ishwara, and dedicating all actions to it as if you are not the doer yourself; is Kriya Yoga.” “Kriya” means the purification which removes all obstacles to Self-realization. Here the master yogi of the nineteenth century is telling us that to constantly repeat Om, focusing on it as the true form of God, and immersing ourselves in it through all our actions, is Kriya Yoga—the path to the Absolute.
Appendix Two:

Breath and Sound in Meditation

When we meditate we do not sit in silent blankness because that would not return us to our eternal consciousness of Spirit. Instead we have to have the right inner environment for the return to take place. This is provided by two things: Om and the breath. So important is this, that although a good deal has been said so far about these two and their joining in meditation practice, I feel that this entire chapter is essential for a perfect understanding of Om Yoga.

Swami Vivekananda, writing on Raja Yoga, points out that according to the philosophers of India the whole universe is composed of two materials: akasha and prana. “Just as Akasha is the infinite, omnipresent material of this universe, so is this Prana the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe.” Sound rises directly from akasha, and breath rises directly from prana. Since they arise from the spirit-center, when their right joining is done they free and enable us to return and merge our consciousness with that center. Joining the two, we go straight to the heart of ourselves and the universe. That is, we go directly to the Heart of Brahman.

As the Shvetashvatara Upanishad says, the breath and Om are like two firesticks. Fire is inherent in both, but only when the two are brought
Breath and Sound in Meditation

together in friction does the fire come forth. The fire we are wanting to bring forth is the spirit-consciousness that is our real Self.

In Indian mythology it is said that the realm of Vishnu is guarded by two doorkeepers who escort the questing soul into the Divine Presence. This is a symbol of the breath and Om which when united bring the yogi into the world of higher consciousness. In the realm of meditation, the doorkeepers/companions conduct the seeker into the throne room and then stand at the door to guard against intruders. That is, the breath and Om lead us into the realm of the Chidakasha, the Space of Consciousness, and keep guard there against the intrusion of distracting thoughts and states of mind, seeing that nothing disturbs our inner quest. These two companion-friends deserve our careful study.

The Role of Breath in Meditation

Breath, the universal factor

The Sanskrit word prana means both “breath” and “life.” Breath is the single universal factor of life: all that lives, breathes. Therefore meditation practices involving the breath are found in many mystical traditions. The process of breath is identical in all beings, consisting of inhalation and exhalation, expansion and contraction. It is the most immaterial factor of our existence, the body-mind-spirit link. For this reason, the breath is a natural and logical factor in meditation.

Breath and Yoga

The reason why breath plays such an important part in the technique of classical Yoga lies in the close relation existing between breath and mind. “Breath and mind arise from the same source,” the Self, according to Sri Ramana Maharshi in Day By Day With Bhagavan. One of the most profound texts on the philosophy behind yoga, the Shiva Sutras, says: “The connection of pure consciousness with breath [prana] is natural” (Shiva Sutras 3:43). Breath is the meeting place of body, mind, and spirit.
The breath and the *body* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the body is calm, and agitated or labored when the body is agitated or labored. The heavy exhalation made when feeling exhausted and the enthusiastic inhalation made when feeling energized or exhilarated establish the same fact.

The breath and the *emotions* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the emotions are calm, and agitated and labored when the emotions are agitated or out of control. Our drawing of a quick breath, when we are surprised, shocked, or fearful, and the forceful exhalation done when angry or annoyed demonstrate this.

The breath and the *mind* are completely interconnected and interrelated, as is seen from the fact that the breath is calm when the mind is calm, and agitated, irregular, and labored when the mind is agitated or disturbed in any way. Our holding of the breath when attempting intense concentration also shows this.

Breath, which exists on all planes of manifestation, is the connecting link between matter and energy on the one hand and consciousness and mind on the other. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical.

We start with awareness of the ordinary physical breath, but that awareness, when cultivated correctly, leads us into higher awareness which enables us to perceive the subtle movement behind the breath. Ultimately, we come into contact with the breather of the breath, our own spirit.

In many spiritual traditions the same word is used for both breath and spirit, underscoring the esoteric principle that in essence they are the same, though we naturally think of spirit as being the cause of breath(ing). The word used for both breath and spirit is: In Judaism, *Ruach*. In Eastern Christianity (and ancient Greek religion), *Pneuma*. In Western Christianity (and ancient Roman religion), *Spiritus* (which
comes from *spira,* “I breathe”). In Hinduism and Buddhism, *Atma* (from the root word *at* which means “to breathe”), and *Prana.*

**Arthur Avalon**

The books of Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodruffe) are unparalleled in their value regarding the many aspects of yoga. Here are three quotations from them regarding breath in the context of yoga.

“The ultimate reality is Satcidananda which, as the source of appearances, is called Shakti. The latter in its Sat (Being) aspect is omnipresent-indestructible (eternal) Source and Basis both of the Cosmic Breath or Prana as also of all vital phenomena displayed as the individual Prana in separate and concrete bodies” (*The Garland of Letters*, p. 140).

“The individual breath is the Cosmic Breath from which it seems to be different by the forms which the latter vitalizes” (*The Garland of Letters*, p. 157).

“Breathing is a manifestation of the Cosmic Rhythm to which the whole universe moves and according to which it appears and disappears” (*Shakti and Shakta*).

Breath, then, is an essential ingredient of liberating yoga because the breath is the spirit-Self in extension, and through it we can become established in the consciousness that is the Self.

**The identity of the breath with the individual spirit, the Atman (Self)**

“The Self is the breath of the breath” (Kena Upanishad 1:2).

“The subtle Self within the living and breathing body is realized in that pure consciousness wherein is no duality” (Mundaka Upanishad 3:1:9).

“The breaths are the Real, and their Reality is the Self” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.20).

“The Self is The Truth of Truth, and verily the Breath is Truth, and the Self is the Truth of the Breath” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.6).

“He who breathes in with your breathing in is your Self. He who breathes out with your breathing out is your Self” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.4.1).
The identity of the breath with the Supreme Spirit, Brahman

But breath is much more than an individual matter, it is also a bridge to the infinite consciousness, being the living presence and action of God (Brahman).

“O Prana, lord of creation, thou as breath dwellest in the body” (Prashna Upanishad 2.7).

“When one breathes, one knows him as breath” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.7).

“Self-luminous is that being, and formless. He dwells within all and without all. He is unborn, pure, greater than the greatest. From him is born the breath” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.2, 3). Since the breath rises from God, it can be resolved back into God.

“Breath is a part of Brahman” (Chandogya Upanishad 4.9.3). Breath is itself divine.

“The being who is the breath within—him I meditate upon as Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.6).

“Breath is the Immortal One” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.6.3).

“The shining, immortal person who is breath is the Self, is Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.5.4).

“Which is the one God? The breath. He is Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.9.9).

“They who know the breath of the breath…have realized the ancient, primordial Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.18).

“The breath is the supreme Brahman. The breath never deserts him who, knowing thus, meditates upon it. Having become a god, he goes to the gods” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.1.3).

Ramana Maharshi on the breath

In *Maha Yoga*, Sri Ramana says: “Pranayama is of two kinds: one of controlling and regulating the breath and the other of simply watching the breath.” In the book *Day By Day With Bhagavan*: “[Seekers] are advised to watch their breathing, since such watching will naturally and
as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control.” When asked in the same conversation about actually controlling the breath, he commented: “Watching the breath is also one form of pranayama. Retaining breath, etc., is more violent and may be harmful in some cases…. But merely watching the breath is easy and involves no risk.”

In *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*: “To watch the breath is one way of doing pranayama. The mind abstracted from other activities is engaged in watching the breath. That controls the breath; and in its turn the mind is controlled.” And further: “Breath and mind arise from the same source. The source can be reached by regulating the breath…. Regulation of the breath is accomplished by watching its movements.” And: “It is the Atman that activates the mind and the breaths” (*The Power of the Presence*, vol. III, p. 230).

**The Role of Sound in Meditation**

**Liberating sound**

Why do we use sound in meditation? “By sound one becomes liberated [Anavrittih shabdai],” is the concluding verse of the Brahma Sutras (4.4.22). How is this so?

Why do we use sound in meditation? Why not use one of the other senses or faculties, since touch, sight, taste, and smell must also possess increasingly subtler forms until they reach the point of their emerging? It is true that these four faculties do have subtle forms, but only sound reaches to the ultimate point of emergence.

The five senses correspond to the five elements of which all things consist. Those elements are ether [akasha], air [vayu], fire [agni], water [apah], and earth [prithvi]. That is, their grossest forms are those of sound [shabda], touch [sparsha], sight [drishti], taste [rasa], and smell [gandha] as perceived by the bodily senses. Because of this we use these terms to refer to them. But the water element is not just the liquid we
call water, it is much more, having roots in the astral and causal planes. The same is true of the other elements.

When relative existence, individual or cosmic, begins, there is a chain of manifestation. First there is the out-turning of the consciousness itself. This modification on the cosmic level is the emerging of the Mahat Tattwa, the Great Element, that is the Personal or Saguna Brahman, spoken of in Christianity as “the Only-begotten of the Father” or Son of God. In the individual this is the sense of *asmīta*: I-am-ness. Then the Pradhana [Prakriti] modifies itself into the five elements, beginning with ether, and each succeeding element contains within itself some of the preceding elements. That is, air is mixed with some ether. Fire possesses some of the ether and air element. Water has some fire, air, and ether. Earth has some water, fire, air, and ether. So only ether is unmixed, and only ether is touching the principle of consciousness, only ether is in direct contact with the spirit. Yet ether (akasha) pervades all the other elements as their prime constituent—actually as their source and core element. Sound is the quality (or faculty) of ether; touch is the quality of air; sight is the quality of fire; taste is the quality of water; and smell is the quality of earth. Sound, then, is the only thing that reaches back to the principle of consciousness. The other elements stop somewhere along the way. Sound, then, can affect all the elements.

The five elements also correspond to the five levels or bodies known as koshas: the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya, and annamaya bodies. These are the will, intellectual, mental (sensory), bio-magnetic, and physical bodies. The highest (most subtle) body is the etheric body (anandamaya kosha) which is the seat of sound or speech.

There is more. The other four elements have only one faculty or power, but akasha has two faculties or powers: Vak and Shabda: Speaking and Hearing. The faculties of the four other elements are all passive. The faculty of smell cannot generate smells, the faculty of taste cannot generate tastes, etc., though the memory or imagination of them is possible. Ether, on the other hand, has the capacity to both generate and hear sound.
on the mental levels. The etheric faculty both speaks and hears what it speaks, is both active and passive. This is unique among the elements. Akasha alone possesses the creative power, the power of sound.

Consciousness is the root of sound, and is innate in sound. Sound, then, is the direct means to return our awareness to the inmost level of our being and put us into touch with consciousness itself. At the same time, sound rules all the levels of our being and has the ability to infuse all those levels with the highest spiritual consciousness, to spiritualize every bit of us. Om, then, is both energy and consciousness. Listening to our inner intonations of Om during japa and meditation right away centers our awareness in the highest, etheric level of our being. It returns our awareness to its source and gathers up and centers every other aspect of our being in spiritual consciousness.

Through japa and meditation the Divine Sound, Om, pervades all our bodies and corrects, directs, and empowers them to perfectly and fully manifest all their potentials, which is the root purpose of our relative existence. Through Om Yoga practice all the aspects of our being are brought into perfect fruition and then enabled to merge back into their Source in the state of absolute liberation. Om Yoga, then, embraces all the aspects of our existence, not only the highest part, and is supremely practical. Om, through its japa and meditation, perfects our entire being.

When we inwardly intone Om and become absorbed in that sound, by centering our awareness in the act of intoning Om and listening to it, we become centered in the Chidakasha, the consciousness that is our Self. Various texts inform us that both Om and the breath arise directly from the Chidakasha. For this reason in Om Yoga meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath.

Experiencing the Chidakasha to greater and greater degrees within meditation is the highest experience for the yogi. The more we meditate, the higher and higher and further and further we penetrate into the infinite consciousness of which we are an eternal part. The process of
meditation takes place within the Chidakasha, the seat of the spirit-Self that is itself the Chidakasha.

**Internal sound**

We use sound in Om Yoga, but it is not just any form of sound. It is sound that is produced (generated) in the mind, not sound that is passively heard either through the ears or through the memory of auditory sound. This generation of sound is the process known as thinking. So yoga is accomplished by the generation and observation of a thought in the mind. This is why Shankara, commenting on Yoga Sutra 2:20, says that the activity of pure consciousness in the individual is “observation of thoughts in the mind.…Purusha, looking on at thought in the mind alone, sees only that, and never fails to see thought which is his object.…To witness is natural to him, in the sense that his essence is awareness of the mind’s ideas.” (“Mind is by definition the object of purusha” observes Vyasa.)

Now this is extremely profound. *The only thing we ever do in our real nature as pure consciousness is to observe thoughts in the intellect (buddhi).* That is why when Sri Ramakrishna was asked: “What is the Self?” he simply replied: “The witness of the mind.” Sense impressions are perceived a step away from that in the lower mind (manas). Perceiving thought is the sole activity of the spirit-consciousness. Perception of thought is also a perpetual activity of the purusha. It is only reasonable then to conclude that to discover the true Self or to cause the Self to become established in its real nature we must employ the faculty of thought. Yet it is thought that is tangling us up all the time in false identities. So it is not just thought in general that we need, but a special kind of thought, one that turns the awareness back upon itself and eventually merges itself into the pure consciousness that is spirit. That unique thought is Om. “Its japa and meditation is the way.” Our eternal nature ensures our success.
The genealogy of sound

The cosmos and the individual are manifested by the same process: ever-expanding sound-vibration, Spanda. First there comes the most subtle expansion-movement or vibration on the causal level where rather than an objective sound it is a bhava, the slightest differentiation of primal consciousness. This is known as dhvani. Dhvani then expands and mutates into nada, which is sound, but in such a subtle form that it is more an idea of sound rather than actual sound. Nada develops into nirodhika, a kind of focussing of the energy so it becomes potential sound. This expands and becomes arda-indu (ardhendu), the half-moon which is the crescent shape seen on the Om symbol and on the head of Shiva. This is both thought and sound, but sound that can only be heard as the faintest of inner mental sounds. Ardhendu then expands and becomes bindu, the vibratory source-point. This bindu is fully sound, but on the interior level only. It cannot be spoken aloud, it cannot be spoken at all, but only perceived and entered into as the first step back to the source consciousness that is Spirit. Yet, from bindu comes all the permutations that are the various sounds which are combined to form words, including mantras.

According to the yoga scriptures there are three basic forms of sound or speech: 1) pashyanti, that which can only be intuited or felt rather than heard, even within; 2) madhya, that which can be heard in the mind as thought; and 3) vaikhari, that which is physically spoken and heard outwardly by the ear through the vibration of the air. But beyond even these is the transcendental sound, para-vak or supreme speech, which is soundless sound, consciousness itself. Om encompasses all three.

“When men sent out Vak’s [Speech’s] first and earliest utterances, all that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was disclosed…. the trace of Vak they followed, and found her harboring within” (Rig Veda 10.71.1, 2). This hymn of the Rig Veda speaks of Vak, the creative Sound from which all things came. This Sound both manifested all things and revealed them: produced the consciousness capable of
perceiving them. The sages, the hymn tells us, traced Vak (Om) back to the source and discovered it was within themselves as both Power and Consciousness.

Meditation is the process of tracing discovered by the sages, the procedure by which the yogi enters into the inner levels of Om, tracing it to its very source which is consciousness. As he does so, he experiences within the depths of his awareness the subtle states of consciousness, or bhava, inherent in Om. For this reason the word frequently translated meditation in texts relating to yoga is *bhavanam*, the experiencing of the inner states of consciousness called bhavas. Meditation leads us right into the heart of Om as we trace its sound back through its many permutations to its original bhava or impulse of consciousness that expanded outward to manifest as its outermost form of the spoken Om.

**Retracing consciousness**

As we enter into relative consciousness through the expansion of sound, just so can we enter back into transcendent consciousness through the intentional contraction of sound that occurs in meditation. Tracing Om back to its source, the Om yogi discovers it within himself as both Power and Consciousness, experiencing the subtle states of Om and the subtle consciousness inherent in Om.

This procedure is spoken of in the Katha Upanishad: “The Self, though hidden in all beings, does not shine forth but can be seen by those subtle seers, through their sharp and subtle intelligence. The wise man should restrain speech into the mind; the latter he should restrain into the understanding Self. The understanding self he should restrain into the great self. That he should restrain into the tranquil self” (Katha Upanishad 1.3.12,13). By “mind” is meant the manas, the sensory mind; by “understanding self” is meant the buddhi, the intellect; by “the great self” is meant the will; and by “tranquil self” is meant the subtlest level, the Chidakasha, the witness-link between our pure consciousness and our perceptions.
In *Viveka Chudamani* (verse 369) Shankara expresses it this way: “Restrain speech in the manas, and restrain manas in the buddhi; this again restrain in the witness of the buddhi [the chidakasha], and merging that also in the Infinite Absolute Self, attain to Supreme Peace.”

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad tells us: “The faculty of speech is the place of merging” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.11). In the subtle sound of Om the consciousness of the yogi is resolved into its pure, divine state.

**I. K. Taimni on japa and meditation**

In *The Science of Yoga* I. K. Taimni says this regarding japa and meditation:

“Japa begins in a mechanical repetition but it should pass by stages into a form of meditation and unfoldment of the deeper layers of consciousness.

“The efficacy of japa is based upon the fact that every jivatma is a microcosm thus having within himself the potentialities of developing all states of consciousness and all powers which are present in the active form in the macrocosm. All the forces which can help this Divine spark within each human heart to become a roaring fire are to be applied. And the unfoldment of consciousness takes place as a result of the combined action of all these forces….A mantra is a sound combination and thus represents a physical vibration which is perceptible to the physical ear. But this physical vibration is its outermost expression, and hidden behind the physical vibration and connected with it are subtler vibrations much in the same way as the dense physical body of man is his outermost expression and is connected with his subtler vehicles. These different aspects of *Vak* or ‘speech’ are called *Vaikhari, Madhyama, Pashyanti* and *Para*. Vaikhari is the audible sound which can lead through the intermediate stages to the subtest form of *Para Vak*. It is really through the agency of these subtler forms of ‘sound’ that the unfoldment of consciousness takes place and the hidden potentialities become active powers. This
release of powers takes a definite course according to the specific nature of the mantra just as a seed grows into a tree, but into a particular kind of tree according to the nature of the seed.”

And Om being the seed of the totality of consciousness, of Brahman Itself, the Om Yogi grows into Perfect Divinity by means of its japa and meditation.

**Ramana Maharshi on Om**


“Pratyahara [interiorization of the mind] is regulating the mind by preventing it from flowing towards the external names and forms. The mind, which had been till then distracted, now becomes controlled. The aids in this respect are meditation on the Pranava and reflection on the Nada [the subtle sound of Om experienced in meditation]” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 24).

“The purport of prescribing meditation on the Pranava is this. The Pranava is Omkara…the advaita-mantra which is the essence of all mantras…. In order to get at this true significance, one should meditate on the Pranava. …The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [moksha], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 25, 26).

“The subtle body of the Creator is the mystic sound Pranava, which is sound and light. The universe resolves into sound and light and then into transcendence–Param” (Section 215 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*).

“Om is the eternal truth. That which remains over after the disappearance of objects is Om. It does not merge in anything. It is the State of which it is said: “Where one sees none other, hears none other, knows none other, that is Perfection” (*Yatra nanyat pasyati, nanyat srunoti, nanyat vijanati sa bhuma*) (Section 634 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*).
“Maunam [silence] is the state of Shakti [power] that emerges from within as Ekakshara [Om]” (*Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G. V. Subbarayamayya, p. 149).

“Yesterday a Hindu asked Bhagavan, ‘Is Omkara a name of Ishwara?’ Bhagavan said, ‘Omkara is Ishwara, Ishwara is Omkara. That means Omkara Itself is the swarupam (the real form of the Self)” (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 60).

“Omkara itself is Brahman. That Brahman is the nameless and formless pure SAT [Reality]. It is That that is called Omkara. ... Omkara which is beyond the speech or the mind and which can only be experienced, cannot be described by word of mouth” (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 119).

“Om is everything” (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 214).

“Earnest seekers who, incessantly and with a steady mind, repeat ‘Om’ will attain success. By repetition of the pure ‘Om’ the mind is withdrawn from sense objects and becomes one with the Self” (*Sri Ramana Gita* 3:10,11, Ganapati Muni).

“Japa reaching to the source of sound is the best course for those who are not firm in consciousness which is the source of the ‘I’” (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharishi*, sixth edition, p. 145). And only Om leads us to the source of sound.

Sri Ramana recommended study of the Ribhu Gita, a traditional text of Advaita. It simply says: “The Syllable ‘Om’ is the self” (Ribhu Gita 10:22).

**The Unity of the Breath and Om**

As already cited, commenting on Yoga Sutra 1:34, Vivekananda says: “The whole universe is a combination of prana and akasha.” Practically speaking we, too, are formed of prana and akasha, of breath and sound which are the manifestation of prana and akasha. Yoga is a combining of breath and sound.
Om is the essential sound-energy form that manifests in living beings as the breath itself. Om is the sound-form of the subtle power of life which originates in the pure consciousness, the spirit, of each one of us and extends outward to manifest as the inhaling and exhaling breaths. “The breath is continually sounding ‘Om’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) Hence, through the intoning of Om in meditation we can become attuned to the essential Breath of Life and aware of its subtle movements within. Joined to our breath, the mantric formula Om will lead us to the awareness of Breath and Life in their pure state. For Om is both the breath and the Source of the breath. When joined to Om, the breath becomes a flowing stream of consciousness.

In the beginning

In the beginning, there arose in the ocean of divine consciousness, a point (bindu) from which began flowing the stream of creative energy that manifested as all things, and back into which all things return. That Primal Point became dual upon the very moment of its arising. That duality manifested as Prana/Breath and Sound—specifically, Om. The same thing happened with us. We came into manifestation on the twin streams of subtle breath and Om.

Originally we were unmanifest, as transcendental as our Source. But just as the Source expanded into relative manifestation, so did we. In our undifferentiated being, the state of perfect unity, there manifested a single stress point (bindu or sphota). This did not upset or disrupt the original unity but it did just what I said: it stressed it. Then, so imperceptibly and subtly as to hardly have even occurred, that stress point became dual and began to move internally, producing a magnetic duality so subtle it was really more an idea than an actual condition. Then the halves or poles of that duality began alternating in dominance and a cycling or circling began. This cycling expanded ever outward, manifesting in increasingly more objective manners until at last the full state of relativity was reached complete with a set of complex bodies
of infinitely varying levels of energy, everything we consider ourselves. The same thing had already happened to our Source on a cosmic level so we found a virtually infinite environment for our manifestation. This is the process known as samsara.

The two original poles of the primal unity are prana (life force) which manifests in us most objectively as breath, and shabda (sound) which manifests in us most objectively as the mantra Om—and secondarily that of hearing. These seemingly two creative streams of manifestation are in reality one, inseparable from one another, and together are capable of leading us back to their and our source. One or the other can do a great deal toward returning us to Unity. But the ultimate, full return can occur most easily when they are joined in the practice of Om Yoga. Like the cosmos, we came into manifestation on the twin streams of subtle breath and Om. Together these two wings have carried us upward into the heights of evolution.

The return

“Speech and breath are joined together in the Syllable Om” (Chandogyu Upanishad 1.1.6). Om is the essence of the breath and the breath is the essence of Om—particularly in their most subtle forms. Speech and breath are manifested and reunited in Om by mentally intoning it in time with the breath. “This is the bridge to immortality” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6).

To turn back from samsara and return to our original unity we must grasp hold of that primal impulse to duality which manifested in the stress point from which all has occurred. Right now that original impulse is manifesting most objectively in the process of our physical inhaling and exhaling and in our inner power of speech as we intone Om. The breath and Om together comprise the evolutionary force which causes us to enter samsara and manifest therein until—also through the breath and sound—we evolve to the point where we are ready to discard the evolutionary school of samsara and return to our original status with
a now-perfected consciousness. By joining Om and the breath in japa and meditation we begin moving back to the state where they are one.

“One should meditate on the breath...for it is continually sounding ‘Om.’” (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3) In japa and meditation we join intonations of Om to the breath because on the subtle levels the breath is always producing the sound of Om. We can even say that the soul breathes Om. When our intonations of Om become subtle and whisper-like they are the actual breath sounds, the real sounds of the etheric breath. So by joining Om to our breathing we can link up with our soul-consciousness and enter into it. That is the point of Unity where the breath and Om are not two extensions, but a single unit. Here, too, the breath is one, moving in a circular manner or expanding and contracting rather than extending and moving in and out or back and forth. Joining our intonations of Om to the breath in a fully easeful manner attunes us to that level of breath and sound.

The evolving breath

Life and evolution are synonymous. Just as Brahman has wrapped Itself in creative, evolutionary energy, Prakriti, and is actively engaged in cosmic progression toward perfection, in the same way the individual spirit (Atman) is encased in its own energy-prakriti and is evolving it toward perfection. This is life within Life. Both the cosmic and the individual life-force are known as prana—vital energy—which manifests as breath. All that exists is formed of prana-breath, which acts as a mirror for the individual and cosmic spirits, changing and modifying itself as they change and modify as they evolve. The original impulse which begins, sustains, and completes all evolution is Om. The dance of creation is the moving of prana-breath to the directing sound-vibration of Om.

Relativity evolves through the alternating cycles of creation and dissolution—outward movement and inward movement—and in the same way the simple act of breathing evolves all sentient beings, whose fundamental common trait is that of breathing. This is because the
breath is always sounding Om in the process the yogis call *ajapa japa*: involuntary/automatic repetition. (This is also true on the cosmic level. The cosmos is breathing Om.) Thus merely living and breathing is a process of ascent in consciousness *if* the individual does nothing to counteract that process, which we all do, retarding our progress and causing ourselves to become bound to the wheel of continual birth and death. So it is necessary to live in the manner that allows this automatic development to go forward and manifest.

In time, however, a profound point of evolution is reached in which the individual becomes capable of consciously evolving himself and thereby speeding up the process of unfolding his consciousness. He does this by consciously doing what he has heretofore done only unconsciously: linking the repetition of Om to his breath, merging it with the breath movements.

The original purpose of the original duality of breath and Om was to enable us to descend into the plane of relativity and begin evolving therein until we could develop the capacity for infinite consciousness. They not only moved us downward into material embodiment, they also began to impel us upward on the evolutionary scale so we might finally develop or evolve to the point where we can finally share and actually participate in the infinity of God. If unhindered, they would accomplish this evolutionary movement. But in our present state we are always thwarting their purpose, especially by keeping their action bound and buried in the subconscious rather than resurrecting them into our conscious life, applying them and cooperating with them and thereby accelerating our growth. When awareness of the breath is consciously cultivated, and the sacred mantra Om is joined to every breath, the two currents become united and oriented toward their original purpose, which they then accomplish. In this way every single breath and intonation of Om become a step forward and upward on the path of spiritual evolution.
**Two swastikas**

Though spoiled for many of us who associate it with the evil of Nazism, the swastika is one of the most ancient symbols of India and has a profound yogic significance. There are two swastikas. One has the arms bent toward the right and the other toward the left. They represent two vortices of energy, one moving clockwise and the other moving counterclockwise. They are usually confused by people. The so-called “righthand swastika” with arms bent toward the right is actually a symbol of leftward moving energy, the movement of contraction and involution. The “lefthand swastika” with arms bent toward the left, is really a depiction of rightward moving energy, the movement of expansion and evolution.

Through our attention focussed on the process of intoning Om in time with our inhalation and exhalation, we can become immersed in the subtler levels of that alternating cycle, sinking into deeper and deeper levels until we at last come to the originating point and then transcend that dual movement, regaining our lost unity. By continual practice of that transcendence in meditation we will become established in that unity and freed forever from all forms of bondage, having attained nirvana: permanent unbinding. This is why both sound and breath must be the focus of our internal cultivation.

The two swastikas do not just depict directions of movement, but are yogic symbols of the inhaling and exhaling breaths joined to the intonation of Om. As already indicated there are two Om’s, or two sides of the single Om, one of positive polarity and one of negative polarity. Om intoned while inhaling is of negative polarity (yin), and Om intoned while exhaling is of positive polarity (yang). By intoning Om once while inhaling and once while exhaling we produce a complete Om of both polarities.

**The inner and the outer**

There are two breaths, the outer breath and the subtle inner breath which produces it. And there is the outer speech and the subtle inner
speech from which it arises. By centering our awareness on the outer breath and sound and merging them we make ourselves aware of the inner Breath and Sound of Life. They occur at the same time and are of the same duration. By attuning ourselves to them we attune ourselves to the spirit from which they take their origin. The more attention we give to the breath and Om, the subtler they become until they reveal themselves as acts of the mind, and finally as consisting of mind-stuff (chitta) itself.

Not “things”

When we examine their nature, we see that the breath and the sound of Om are not “things,” but processes which have the power to draw us into the core point from which they arise: the individual spirit itself whose nature is consciousness. In this way the pure Self manifests and works its will, changing all the levels of our being.

The Self and the Supreme Self

There are many scriptural statements that Om is our own Self, or Atman, such as: “The Self is of the nature of the Syllable Om. Thus the Syllable Om is the very Self” (Mandukya Upanishad 1, 8). “Meditate on Om as the Self” (Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.3-6). But in the Kena Upanishad we also find: “The Self is the breath of the breath” (Kena Upanishad 1:2). And in the Mundaka Upanishad (3:1:9): “The subtle Self within the living and breathing body is realized in that pure consciousness wherein is no duality.”

Beyond the Self is the Supreme Self–Brahman–and the scriptures tell us that Om is Brahman as well. “Om is Brahman, the Primeval Being” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1). “Om is the supreme Brahman” (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:7). “Om is Brahman” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.1). And they tell us the same of the breath. The Chandogya Upanishad (4.9.3): “Breath is a part of Brahman.” The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.1.6) has this to say: “The being who is the breath within–him I meditate
upon as Brahman….That which breathes in is thy Self, which is within all….That which breathes out is thy Self, which is within all….Breath is the abode of Brahman.”

**Their divine work**

It cannot be overemphasized that the breath and Om are the *only* objects that transfer our awareness into the subject: consciousness itself. All other objects draw our attention outward, into the experience of them, and perpetuate the loss of Self-awareness which is our root problem. This is true of any objects other than the breath and Om that are brought into meditation; they not only are incapable of producing the awareness of pure consciousness, they make it impossible. This should not be forgotten.

**Natural (sahaja) practice**

If our spiritual practice (sadhana) is to bring us to our eternal, natural state of spirit-consciousness, it, too, must be totally natural. Therefore the term *sahaja* is often found in yoga treatises. Sahaja means that which is natural, innate, spontaneous, and inborn. Om Yoga alone fits this criterion, for the prana/breath movement occurs in every evolving sentient being, even in every atom of the cosmos. And that movement is inseparable from the vibration of the subtle sound of Om. Though seemingly two, the movement of the breath and the vibrating of Om are the same thing, like fire and its heat. Not only that, this is the only characteristic common to all forms of existence, from the atom to the perfectly liberated individual. Nothing, then, is more natural than the intoning of Om in time with the breath. It is the key, then, to our inmost, true Self and its revelation.
Appendix Three:

Practical Applications of OM

There are various ways in which Om can be invoked for blessing and benefitting yourself and others.

Om purascharana

To awaken and establish Om within yourself as a living divine presence, it is good to do what the yogis of India call Mantra Purascharana. Purascharana is the repetition of a mantra one hundred thousand times for each letter in it. Om is *Ekakshara*, the Single-Lettered, because only consonants are counted as “letters” in Sanskrit. So you repeat Om one hundred thousand times to complete the purascharana.

You will need to keep count. This is done by using a string of beads known as a japa mala. A japa mala has one hundred and eight beads plus a kind of connecting bead at the end that lets you know when you have completed a full round. You do not do japa at/on that bead. So to complete the purascharana you will do one thousand rounds on the japa mala.

Here is how you go about it. As you mentally intone Om once, roll a bead so you move on to the next one. When you complete a round of the whole mala, make some kind of mark on a piece of paper or in a notebook. One thousand marks lets you know you are done.
If you have a mala that has a string with ten small counter beads hanging off the end bead, start with them at the top of the string and move one bead down each time you complete a round. When all ten beads have been moved down, then make a mark. When you have made one hundred marks, each mark representing ten completed malas, you will be done, having completed the thousand rounds of one hundred and eight repetitions each.

(If your japa mala is being kept in a japa bag and the counter beads are affixed to the bag, use them in the same way. If you have twenty counter beads instead of ten, the you will only need to make fifty marks instead of one hundred.)

All the japa (repetitions) being counted in the purascharana should be done seated with eyes closed in meditation. Do not worry if the mind wanders some. That is natural. It will still work.

Outside your seated meditation time keep right on intoning Om every waking moment, though not keeping count. (But you can keep turning the beads if it helps you remember to do the japa.) Just listen to the mentally intoned sounds as much as possible. It will get easier as you go along. Immerse your inner awareness in Om whatever you are doing. Outside the counting time you can do Om japa in time with the breath if you like. Sometimes you might want to intone Om aloud for a while.

How long should you sit at a time? Work that out by practice. Do not overdo and do not underdo. The mind can try to trick you into both. However, one and a half hours is a good minimum period, working up to three hours as a standard time period with an hour or less as free time between the three-hour periods. During free time you can read or even have a meal.

And do not care how long the purascharana takes. It is the effect that matters, not the time taken. As a rule if a person does the counted japa steadily, but not rushed, the purascharana can be completed somewhere between three and four days—if the counted japa is done for eight to nine hours a day. Since that figure will have to be worked up to, it might
take about a week to easily complete the purascharana unless something unusual comes up to interrupt it.

**Yoga days**

An alternative to Purascharana is a Yoga Day. On a Yoga Day you stay at home and unplug: turn off the telephone, computer, smart phone, CD player, television and radio, read nothing but spiritual writings and meditate. Meditation is the heart of a Yoga Day. Ideally, you should meditate for at least two three-hour periods, but you may need to work up to that. For some reason three hours is a breakthrough, watershed or plateau number, for if you can meditate for three hours you can meditate even longer. You can do as much more as you wish, but it should be sensible and not forced. A Yoga Day is to be enjoyable and beneficial, not a struggle and a misery. Be sure you eat sensibly, too. Fasting is not what it is about.

A typical Yoga Day begins with a three-hour meditation session at a sensibly early hour. This is followed by a one-hour break during which you should eat breakfast and read. Then meditate three more hours. The rest of the day should be structured as you please, ending also at a sensible time. It is better to go to bed early rather than late. You might have some more meditation in one-hour sessions, or a two-hour session or another three-hour session. Just as you like. Do not push yourself and do not slack off. Do not leave the house and go for a walk. And do not answer the door.

Throughout the day keep up the repetitions of Om whether meditating or not. Just listen to the mentally intoned sounds of Om. Immerse your inner awareness in Om whatever you are doing. It will get easier as you go along. To help keep remembering Om you can even use a japa mala as much as you like. Do not worry if your mind wanders; that is natural. The Yoga Day, too, will bring you real benefit, as you will see.

It is good to sometimes have two or more Yoga Days in a row. Some people go out of town to a quiet place where they can be alone for a few
days. Others find a quiet hotel that has vegetarian food and spend their days in a room depending on room service for their food. At such times it is actually good to go on one or two walks each day if you can do so without being distracted or bothered by anyone. Not having contact with people is essential, though of course you should not be rude to anyone. Just do your best to be alone. Insist on it, actually. But politely.

**Sahasrara Awareness**

It increases the effectiveness of the following practices if you are aware of your Sahasrara throughout.

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**Om sandhya**

“Sandhya” means “junction” and usually refers to dawn and sunset, the junctions of day and night.

Shortly before dawn and sunset stand facing east or west with your hands joined palm-to-palm (pranam) and mentally intone Om in the japa-pranayama manner, looking intently at the sun and feeling a connection (or even identity) with it and the evolving energies that flow from the sun. Feel that you are absorbing them throughout your entire being.

Do this until the sun has fully risen or set.

**Solar attunement**

Face the sun, hold hands with palms upright as though holding them out to receive alms, and intone Om silently in time with the
breath. Feel that the power and light of the sun fills your hands and lower arms during inhalations, and disperses throughout your body during the exhalations.

**Filling a place with Om vibrations**

When you mentally intone Om in/at the Sahasrara, the light and power of Om keep on building up throughout your aura and expanding it as long as you keep on intoning Om with your attention at the Sahasrara. Everyone and everything encompassed by that light and power will be uplifted and benefitted. In this way you can fill an entire building or large outdoor area with the vibrations of Om. In this way you can bless a limitless number of people wherever you go. Please do not neglect this simple but wondrous practice.

**Sending Om vibrations to an individual who is present**

Simply look at a person (directly or indirectly) and silently intone Om, feeling it flowing to them and vibrating through them. If they will not be able to see you doing it, extend your hands palms outward toward them and intone Om mentally and feel the vibrations (and even the sound) of Om flowing through your hands and going to them. (To not be noticed you can also unobtrusively hold your hands toward them with your fingertips pointing toward them. For example, you can put your open hands on your knees or thighs and aim your fingertips at them.) Do this until you feel you have done enough.

**Sending Om vibrations to an individual who is not present**

Sit quietly and bring the person to mind. Then do simple mental japa of Om, feeling and intending that the vibrations should pervade them. Continue until you feel you should stop. You can also hold your hands out in front of you and intend the Om vibrations to go through your hands to them. If someone might observe you, then beam Om through your fingertips as described above. It does not matter if your
hands are held or extended toward where they are physically, but if you know the direction they are in and prefer to face that way, do so.

Wherever you sense help is needed, turn in that direction, extend your hands and intone Om (as you exhale). At the same time you can mentally hold in mind an intention or affirmation.

**How to bless something**

You bless objects, places, people—anything, even the whole world—by filling them with Om vibrations.

One way is to extend your hands with palms turned toward them and intone Om while willing the vibrations to emanate from your hands and enter them and permeate them.

Another way is to extend your right hand, palm outward, toward the object while touching the center of your chest with the palm of your left hand as you intone Om.

A third way is to actually touch the object(s) with either your right hand (left palm on chest) or to touch them with both hands as you intone Om.

If for some reason you cannot touch them, then look at them intently and intone Om, feeling that Om is vibrating throughout them.

All food, drink and medicine—anything to be ingested—should be first magnetized with Om through the palm(s) of the hands. In public just look at them.

**Water, Salt and Oil**

Blessed water, salt and oil are very helpful tools for purification, blessing and protection. You bless them in the manners just described. You need not touch them directly, but can if you wish. It is a good idea to repeat the blessing every time you are going to use them, since some elements hold the vibrations longer than others. It is also a good thing to keep some water, salt and oil in a vehicle and even to carry small containers in your pocket or purse.
Use the water to purify and elevate the vibrations of an object or place. Use the salt to break negative psychic links and clear an object or place. Use the oil to do all that as well as to strengthen and heal.

The water should be pure, natural water—not with added chemicals. Do not use distilled water unless there is nothing else. The salt should be pure, natural salt—gray or pink organic salt is preferred. The oil should be pure, organic olive oil of the highest quality.

The ordinary “impure” kind of these three may also be used in time of need. In a pinch use whatever is at hand.

It is useful to fill the oil container with cotton first and then pour in the oil. It can be used like a priest does an oil stock. This is much less messy and easier to control.

Any size containers of any material you like can be used, though it is a good idea to have larger containers at home from which smaller ones can be refilled.

**Om Incense**

Bless one or more sticks of incense, then light it while mentally intoning Om. The incense will radiate the vibrations of Om as long as it burns.

**Om Candles**

Bless a candle as you would incense. Light the wick of the candle mentally intoning Om. The candle will radiate the blessing and purifying vibrations of Om as long as it burns.

You can do this for a special purpose or person, holding your intention in mind as you light the wick of the candle mentally intoning Om.

**Sahasrara Awareness**

Do not forget: It increases the effectiveness of all these methods if you maintain Sahasrara awareness throughout.
Abhaya(m): “Without fear;” fearlessness; a state of steadfastness in which one is not swayed by fear of any kind.

Abhedananda, Swami: A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who spent many years traveling and teaching Vedanta and Yoga in America.

Abhimana: Egoism; conceit; attachment; I-sense; pride; the function of the ego; the delusion of “me” and “mine;” identification with the body.

Abhyasa: Sustained spiritual practice.

Abhyasayoga: Yoga, or union with God, through sustained spiritual practice.

Acharya: Preceptor; teacher; spiritual teacher/guide; guru.

Adharma: Unrighteousness; demerit, failure to perform one’s proper duty; unrighteous action; lawlessness; absence of virtue; all that is contrary to righteousness (dharma).

Adhibhuta: Primal Being; Primal Element; Primordial Matter. Also: Supreme Being and Supreme Element.

Adhidaiva: Primal God; Supreme God.

Adhikara: Authority; qualification; jurisdiction; prerogative; office; claim; privilege.

Adhikari(n): An eligible or qualified person; a worthy person. It implies both fitness and capability.

Adhiyajna: Primal Sacrifice; Supreme Sacrifice.
**Glossary**

**Adhyatma:** The individual Self; the supreme Self; spirit.

**Adhyatmic:** Pertaining to the Self, individual and Supreme.

**Adi Purusha:** The First or Original Purusha. See Purusha.

**Adishakti:** Primal Power.

**Aditya:** The sun; the Sun God.

**Advaita:** Non-dualism; non-duality; literally: not [a] two [dvaita].

**Advaita Vedanta:** The teaching that there is only One Reality (Brahman-Atman), as found in the Upanishads. Non-dualistic philosophy, especially that of Shankara.

**Advaitic:** Non-dual; having to do with the philosophy of Advaita (Non-Dualism).

**Advaitin:** A proponent of Advaita philosophy.

**Advaitist:** A proponent of Advaita philosophy.

**Adyasakti:** The Primal Energy.

**Agama:** Scripture; particularly scriptures dealing with the four topics of temple construction and the making of images, philosophy, meditation practice, and methods of worship.

**Agastya:** A sage and reputed seer of many hymns in the Rig Veda.

**Agni:** Vedic god of fire.

**Agnihotra:** “Fire offering;” a Vedic fire sacrifice.

**Aham Brahmasmi:** “I am Brahman.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

**Ahamkara:** See Ahankara.

**Ahankara:** Ego; egoism or self-conceit; the self-arrogating principle “I,” “I” am-ness; self-consciousness.

**Ahimsa:** Non-injury in thought, word, and deed; non-violence; non-killing; harmlessness.

**Aishwarya:** Dominion, power; lordship; divine glory; majesty; splendor; attribute(s) of Ishwara.

**Ajapa japa:** A yogic term that means the natural, spontaneous sound of the breath that goes on perpetually through the simple act of breathing. This sound is extremely subtle, and though non-verbal is the highest form of mantra.
Ajna chakra: “Command Wheel.” Energy center located at the point between the eyebrows, the “third eye.” The medulla center opposite the point between the eyebrows.

Akarma: Inaction; non-doing.

Akasha: Ether; space; sky; literally: “not visible.” The subtlest of the five elements (panchabhuta), from which the other four arise. It is all-pervading, and is sometimes identified with consciousness—chidakasha. It is the basis of sound (shabda), which is its particular property.

Akhanda: Unbroken (literally: “not broken”); indivisible; undivided; whole.

Akshara: Imperishable; indestructible, immutable, undying; undecaying; unchanging—all in reference to the individual self and the Supreme Self, Brahman. It also means syllable and is used in reference to the ekakshara—the one syllable, the One Imperishable: Om.

Amrita: That which makes one immortal. The nectar of immortality that emerged from the ocean of milk when the gods churned it.

Anahata: “Unstruck;” “unbeaten.” Continuous bell-like inner resonance; the heart; the heart chakra; the inner divine melody (mystic sounds heard by the Yogis); supernatural sound.

Anahata chakra: “Unstruck.” Energy center located in the spine at the point opposite the center of the chest (sternum bone). Seat of the Air element.

Ananda: Bliss; happiness; joy. A fundamental attribute of Brahman, which is Satchidananda: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss.


Anandamayi Ma: One of the major spiritual figures in twentieth-century India, first made known to the West by Paramhansa Yogananda in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Ananta: Infinite; without end; endless; a name of Shesha, the chief of the Nagas, whose coils encircle the earth and who symbolizes eternity, and upon whom Vishnu reclines.

Anatma(n): Not-Self; insentient.

Anga: Limb; individual part; accessory; member. The yoga expounded by
Pantanjali in the Yoga Sutras (Yoga Darshan) has eight limbs: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, dharana, dhyana, pratyahara, and samadhi.

**Anitya:** Impermanent; transient.

**Anna(m):** Food; matter.

**Annamaya kosha:** “The sheath of food (anna).” The physical—or gross—body, made of food.

**Antahkarana:** Internal instrument; fourfold mind: mind, intellect, ego and subconscious mind.

**Antaryamin:** Indweller; inner guide; inner ruler; God as the Inner Controller.

**Anubhava:** Perception; direct personal experience; spiritual experience; intuitive consciousness and knowledge.

**Anushthana:** Observance; religious exercise; repetition of a mantra for a set number of times during a given period; systematic performance of religious practices, usually undertaken for some definite period of time.

**Apana:** The prana that moves downward, producing the excretory functions in general; exhalation.

**Aparigraha:** Non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

**Apunya:** Demerit; vice; non-meritorious acts; unvirtuous deeds; sinful. See Punya.

**Arani:** Sacrificial wood stick for creating fire through friction.

**Arjuna:** The great disciple of Krishna, who imparted to him the teachings found in the Bhagavad Gita. The third of the Pandava brothers who were major figures in the Mahabharata War. His name literally means “bright,” “white,” or “clear.”

**Artha:** Wealth; object; thing. It is the secular value which is both desired and desirable. It satisfies the acquisitive tendency in individuals. It is the economic value.

**Arya(n):** One who is an Arya—literally, “one who strives upward.” Both Arya and Aryan are exclusively psychological terms having nothing whatsoever to do with birth, race, or nationality. In his teachings Buddha habitually referred to spiritually qualified people as “the Aryas.” Although in English translations we find the expressions: “The Four Noble Truths,” and “The

**Arya Dharma:** The Dharma of the Aryas. See Sanatana Dharma.

**Arya Samaj:** The organization founded by Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati in the nineteenth century to encourage the restoration of the more ancient and simple forms of original Vedic religion.

**Asamprajñata samadhi:** Highest superconscious state where the mind and the ego-sense are completely annihilated.

**Asana:** Posture; seat; meditation posture; Hatha Yoga posture.

**Asat:** Unreal[ity]; nonbeing; nonexistence; false; falsehood.

**Asatya:** Unreal; untrue.

**Ashanti:** Absence of peace of mind; restlessness; distraction.

**Ashram(a):** A place for spiritual discipline and study, usually a monastic residence. Also a stage of life. In Hinduism life is divided ideally into four stages (ashramas): 1) the celibate student life (brahmacharya); 2) the married household life (grihasta); 3) the life of retirement (seclusion) and contemplation (vanaprastha); 4) the life of total renunciation (sannyasa).

**Ashtanga Yoga:** The “eight-limbed” Yoga of Patanjali consisting of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi (see separate entries for each “limb”).

**Ashuddha:** Impure; incorrect.

**Ashuddhi:** Impurity.

**Ashwattha:** The pippal (sacred fig) tree, in the Bhagavad Gita, the eternal tree of life whose roots are in heaven. The “world tree” in the sense of the axis of the earth and even of the cosmos.

**Asmita:** I-ness; the sense of “I am;” “I exist;” sense of individuality.

**Asteya:** Non-stealing; honesty; non-misappropriativeness.

**Asura:** Demon; evil being (a-sura: without the light).

**Asurim:** The state of an asura, one who dwells in darkness (a-sura–without the light). The condition of those negative souls who are turned away from divinity and moving further into degradation of consciousness and mode of life.
Atma(n): The individual spirit or Self that is one with Brahman. The true nature or identity.

Atmajnana: Knowledge of the Self.

Atmic: Having to do with the atma–spirit or self.

Aum: Alternate spelling of Om.

Aurobindo Ghosh, Sri: One of India’s greatest yogis and spiritual writers, he was at first involved in the Indian freedom movement, but came to see that yoga was the true path to freedom. His ashram in South India became one of the major spiritual centers in modern India, and his voluminous spiritual writings are read and prized throughout the world.

Avadhuta: “Cast off” (one who has cast off the world utterly). A supreme ascetic and jnani who has renounced all worldly attachments and connections and lives in a state beyond body consciousness, whose behavior is not bound by ordinary social conventions. Usually they wear no clothing. The highest state of asceticism or tapas.

Avatar(a): A Divine Incarnation.

Avidya: Ignorance; nescience; unknowing; literally: “to know not.” Also called ajnana.

Avidyamaya: Maya, or illusion causing duality, has two aspects, namely, avidyamaya and vidyamaya. Avidyamaya, or the “maya of ignorance,” consisting of anger, passion, and so on, entangles one in worldliness. Vidyamaya, or the “maya of knowledge,” consisting of kindness, purity, unselfishness, and so on, leads one to liberation. Both belong to the relative world. See Maya.

Avyakta: Unmanifest; invisible; when the three gunas are in a state of equilibrium’ the undifferentiated.

Ayam Atma Brahma: “This Self is Brahman.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Mandukya Upanishad).

Ayurveda: “Life-knowledge.” The ancient system of Indian medicine formulated by the sage Dhanvantari and considered part of the Vedic revelation.

Bandha: “Lock;” bond; bondage; tie or knot.

Bel: A tree whose leaves are sacred to Siva; also the fruit of the same tree.

Bhagavad Gita: “The Song of God.” The sacred philosophical text often called
“the Hindu Bible,” part of the epic Mahabharata by Vyasa; the most popular sacred text in Hinduism.

**Bhagavan**: The Lord; the One endowed with the six attributes, viz. infinite treasures, strength, glory, splendor knowledge, and renunciation; the Personal God.

**Bhagavati**: Goddess; the feminine form of Bhagavan.

**Bhairava**: Shiva.

**Bhakta**: Devotee; votary; a follower of the path of bhakti, divine love; a worshipper of the Personal God.

**Bhakti**: Devotion; dedication; love (of God).

**Bhakti Marga**: The path of devotion leading to union with God.

**Bhakti Sutra**: An aphoristic work on devotional Yoga authored by the sage Narada. Another text by the same title is ascribed to the sage Shandilya.

**Bhakti Yoga**: The yoga of attaining union with God through the prescribed spiritual discipline of the path of devotion.

**Bhakti Yogi**: One who practices Bhakti Yoga.

**Bhaktivedanta (Swami)**: The founder of the Hari Krishna movement in America.

**Bharat(a)**: The proper Sanskrit name for India; one of the brothers of Rama; a title of Arjuna.

**Bharati**: Indian

**Bharat(a)varsha**: The land of India.

**Bhava**: Subjective state of being (existence); attitude of mind; mental attitude or feeling; state of realization in the heart or mind.

**Bhavanam**: Meditation. “Bhavanam is setting the heart on the Lord Who is designated by Om and brought into the mind by It” (Shankara, Commentary on the Yoga Sutras). It has the connotation of all the awareness becoming focused and absorbed in it.

**Bhavatarini**: “Savior of the World (or Universe),” a title of the Divine Mother, especially Kali.

**Bhaya**: Fear; terror.

**Bheda**: Difference distinction; disjunction.
Glossary

**Bhiksha:** Almsfood—food obtained by begging or that is offered to a monk.

**Bhikshu:** One who lives on bhiksha (almsfood); a mendicant; a sannyasi; also a designation of a Buddhist monk.

**Bhoga:** Enjoyment, pleasure; experience; perception; also food (usually what has been offered to a deity).

**Bhrigu:** An ancient sage, so illustrious that he mediated quarrels among the gods.

**Bhuta (1):** What has come into being; an entity as opposed to the unmanifested; any of the five elementary constituents of the universe; element.

**Bhuta (2):** A spirit. Some bhutas are subhuman nature spirits or “elementals”, but some are earthbound human spirits—ghosts. Bhutas may be either positive or negative.

**Bija:** Seed; source.

**Bija Mantra:** A “seed” mantra from which realization grows as a tree from a seed; usually a single-syllable mantra.

**Bindu:** Point; dot; seed; source; the creative potency of anything where all energies are focused; the point from which the subtle Omkara arises that is experienced in meditation.

**Bodha:** Consciousness; knowledge; “to be awake;” enlightenment.

**Bodhi:** Enlightenment; “to be awakened;” the state of the awakened yogi, or buddha.

**Brahma:** The Creator (Prajapati) of the three worlds of men, angels, and archangels (Bhur, Bhuwah, and Swah); the first of the created beings; Hiranyagarbha or cosmic intelligence.

**Brahma satyam; jagan mithya; jivo brahmaiva naparah:** “Brahman is real. The world is unreal. The jiva is none other than Brahman.” This is Shankara’s renowned “Vedanta in half a verse.”

**Brahma Sutras:** A treatise by Vyasa on Vedanta philosophy in the form of aphorisms. Also called the Vedanta Sutras or Vedanta Darshana.

**Brahmachari:** One who observes continence; a celibate student in the first stage of life (ashrama).

**Brahmacharini:** Female “brahmachari.”
**Brahmacharya:** Continence; self-restraint on all levels; discipline; dwelling in Brahman.

**Brahmajnana:** Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization.

**Brahmajnani:** One who possess Brahmajnana.

**Brahmajyoti:** The Light of God.

**Brahmaloka:** The world (loka) of God (Brahman); the infinite consciousness of God.

**Brahman:** The Absolute Reality; the Truth proclaimed in the Upanishads; the Supreme Reality that is one and indivisible, infinite, and eternal; all-pervading, changeless Existence; Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute (Satchidananda); Absolute Consciousness; it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself; not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and all-bliss itself.

**Brahmana:** A knower of Brahman. A Brahmin. A Vedic liturgical text explaining the rituals found in the Vedic samhitas (collection of hymns). A guidebook for performing those rites.

**Brahmananda:** The bliss of communion with Brahman.

**Brahmanirvana:** The state of liberation (nirvana) that results from total union with Brahman.

**Brahmarandhra:** “The hole of Brahman,” the subtle (astral) aperture in the crown of the head. Said to be the gateway to the Absolute (Brahman) in the thousand-petaled lotus (sahasrara) in the crown of the head. Liberated beings are said to exit the physical body through this aperture at death.

**Brahmarishi:** A knower of Brahman.

**Brahmavadin:** Literally “one who walks the path of Brahman.” One who advocates that there is one existence alone—Parabrahman.

**Brahmavidya:** Science of Brahman; knowledge of Brahman; learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality.

**Brahmin (Brahmana):** A knower of Brahman; a member of the highest Hindu caste consisting of priests, pandits, philosophers, and religious leaders.

**Buddha:** “And awakened one;” one who has attained enlightenment (bodhi),
and thereby moksha (liberation). The usual reference to Gautama (Sakya-muni) Buddha of the sixth century B.C,

**Buddhi:** Intellect; understanding; reason; the thinking mind; the higher mind, which is the seat of wisdom; the discriminating faculty.

**Buddhi Yoga:** The Yoga of Intelligence spoken of in the Bhagavad Gita which later came to be called Jnana Yoga, the Yoga of Knowledge.

**Caste:** See Varna.

**Chaitanya:** Consciousness; intelligence; awareness; the consciousness that knows itself and knows others; Pure Consciousness.

**Chakra:** Wheel. Plexus; center of psychic energy in the human system, particularly in the spine or head.

**Chakradhara:** “Holder/Wielder of the Chakras,” a yogic practice in which the mantra Om is mentally intoned at each of the seven chakras in turn.

**Chandala:** An untouchable, or outcaste; literally: “wild” or “bad.”

**Chetana:** Consciousness. Whereas chaitanya is the principle of pure consciousness, chetana is consciousness occupied with an object. It is this “consciousness” that Buddha rejected as an obstacle.

**Chidakasha:** “The Space (Ether) of Consciousness.” The infinite, all-pervading expanse of Consciousness from which all “things” proceed; the subtle space of Consciousness in the Sahasrara (Thousand-petalled Lotus). The true “heart” of all things.

**Chinmaya:** Full of consciousness; formed of consciousness.

**Chintana:** Thinking; reflecting.

**Chit:** Consciousness (that is spirit or purusha); “to perceive, observe, think, be aware, know;” pure unitary Consciousness.

**Chitshakti:** Power of consciousness or intelligence.

**Chitta:** The subtle energy that is the substance of the mind, and therefore the mind itself; mind in all its aspects; field of the mind; field of consciousness; consciousness; mind-stuff.

**Chitta-vritti-nirodha:** Cessation of the modifications of the mind; control of thoughts; Patanjali’s definition of Yoga.

**Daityas:** Demons who constantly war with the gods. Sometimes “races” or
nationalities who acted contrary to dharma and fought against the “aryas” were also called demons (daityas or asuras).

**Dakshinamurti:** A name for Lord Shiva as the silent teacher. Vedic Religion declares that in every cycle of creation God manifests as Dakshinamurti and becomes the guru of the first human beings—those who were most spiritually evolved in the previous creation—teaching them the path to liberation (moksha).

**Dama:** Self-control; control of the senses; restraint.

**Dana:** “Giving;” gift; charity; almsgiving; self-sacrifice; donation; generosity.

**Darshan:** Literally “sight” or “seeing;” vision, literal and metaphysical; a system of philosophy (see Sad-darshanas). Darshan is the seeing of a holy being as well as the blessing received by seeing such a one.

**Darshana:** “Seeing” in the sense of a viewpoint or system of thought. The Sad-darshanas are the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta.

**Dasanami:** “Ten named.” A term for members of the monastic order of Shankaracharya headquartered in the four quarters of India (Sringeri, Dwaraka, Badrinath and Jagannath Puri). After their proper monastic names they add one of ten titles (Saraswati, Bharati, Puri, Tirtha, Ashrama, Giri, Parvata, Sagara, Vanam, Aranya) according to their monastic succession.

**Dasyu:** A slave; a symbolic term used in the Vedas for those of low and bound consciousness who are the opposite of the Aryans.

**Dattatreya:** A famous sage, son of the Rishi Atri and Anasuya. His birth was a divine boon, hence his name: Datta—“given”—and atreya—“son of Atri.” Considered a divine incarnation and known as the Lord of Avadhutas, he is often revered as the embodiment of the Supreme Guru. He is credited with the authorship of the *Avadhuta Gita*, the *Jivanmukti Gita*, and the *Tripura Rahashya*.

**Daya:** Mercy; compassion; grace; empathy.

**Dayananda (Maharishi Swami):** A leading reformer within Hinduism in the nineteenth century (1824-1883) and the founder of the Arya Samaj.

**Desha:** Place; locus; spot; space; country.
Deva: “A shining one,” a god–greater or lesser in the evolutionary hierarchy; a semi-divine or celestial being with great powers, and therefore a “god.” Sometimes called a demi-god. Devas are the demigods presiding over various powers of material and psychic nature. In many instances “devas” refer to the powers of the senses or the sense organs themselves.

Devaloka: The world (loka) of the gods.

Devata: Godhead; god; divinity; celestial being. See Deva.

Devatma: The divine, inner Self.

Devi: Goddess; the Supreme Shakti (Divine Power) or Divine Mother, or a demigoddess.

Dharana: Concentration of mind; fixing the mind upon a single thing or point. “Dharana is the confining [fixing] of the mind within a point or area” (Yoga Sutras 3:1).

Dharma (1): The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures and the spiritually illumined; characteristics; law; lawfulness; virtue; righteousness; norm.

Dharma (2): Attributes; natures; essential/visible characteristics; characteristic form; properties; qualifications.

Dharma shastras: Scriptures which set forth the rules for society and individuals, including spiritual observances. Manu Smriti is the most authoritative—and the foundation—of all the dharma shastras of India.

Dharmakaya: Reality; the Void; the Absolute; Sheath of the Law—the Embodied Law.

Dharmashala: A place for pilgrims to stay, either free of charge or at a minimal cost.

Dharmic: Having to do with dharma; of the character of dharma.

Dvaita: Dual; duality; dualism.

Dhyana(m): Meditation; contemplation.

Diksha: Initiation.

Dosha: Defect; imperfection; blemish; fault; shortcoming. In Yoga philosophy there are five doshas: lust (kama), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), delusion (moha), and envy (matsarya).
Drishti: Seeing; sight; vision; view; opinion; gaze; perception.

Dukha(m): Pain; suffering; misery; sorrow; grief; unhappiness; stress; that which is unsatisfactory.

Durga: “Incomprehensible One;” “Difficult to reach;” the Universal Mother; she rides a lion (or tiger) and carries a weapon in each of her eight arms symbolizing the powers of the Self against ignorance and evil. She is invoked against all forms of evil—physical and metaphysical. Considered the consort, the shakti, of Shiva.

Dwandwa(s): The pairs of opposites in nature (prakriti) such as pleasure and pain, hot and cold, light and darkness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, love and hatred.

Dwapara Yuga: See Yuga.

Dwesha: Aversion/avoidance for something, implying a dislike for it. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple nonpreference to intense repulsion, antipathy and even hatred. See Raga.

Dwija: “Twice born;” any member of the three upper castes that has received the sacred thread (yajnopavita).

Ekadashi: “The eleventh.” The eleventh day of each half of the lunar month (that is, the eleventh day after the new and full moons) that is devoted to the worship of Vishnu and his avatars.

Ekakshara: A common term for Om meaning “the Single Syllable” or “the Single Letter.”

Ekam-eva-advitiyam: “One, only, without a second.” A description of Brahman.

Gajanana Maharaj: Sri Gajanana Maharaj (Gajanan Murlidhar Gupte) of Nasik in western India (Maharashtra state) was a saint of the Nath Sampradaya in the first half of the twentieth century.

Gana: One of a group of spirits that wander together—usually of various types. The term is also used as a kind of “miscellaneous” category for entities that have not otherwise been identified. A gana may be benevolent or malevolent, but is usually disorderly, chaotic, and wild in the sense of untamed or unruly, and potentially dangerous (hazardous). A gana’s appearance
is usually deformed, repulsive, or frightening. Shiva is said to be always accompanied by a group of devoted ganas.

**Ganapati:** “Lord of the Ganas” (the spirits that always accompany Shiva).

See Ganesha.

**Gandharva:** A demigod—a celestial musician and singer.

**Ganesha:** The elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati; the remover of obstacles; lord (pati) of the ganas (spirits that always accompany Shiva); god of wisdom; god of beginnings; the granter of success in spiritual and material life; in ritual worship he is worshipped first, and is therefore known as Adi-deva, the First God.

**Ganga:** See Ganges.

**Ganges (Ganga):** The sacred river—believed to be of divine origin—that flows from high up in the Himalayas, through the plains of Northern India, and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Hindus consider that bathing in the Ganges profoundly purifies both body and mind.

**Gayatri Mantra:** A Rig Vedic mantra in the gayatri meter invoking the solar powers of evolution and enlightenment, recited at sunrise and sunset.

**Gayatri Meter:** A meter found only in the Rig Veda, consisting of three lines of eight syllables each. It is considered especially appropriate for mantric invocation of deities before worship.

**Gerua:** The brownish-orange mud used to dye the clothing of Hindu monastics; the color produced by dyeing with gerua is also called gerua.

**Ghee:** Clarified butter.

**Giri:** Mountain; one of the ten branches of the Shankara Order.

**Gita:** Song; The Bhagavad Gita.

**Gorakhnath/Gorakshanath:** A master yogi of the Nath Yogi (Siddha Yogi) tradition. His dates are not positively known, but he seems to have lived for many centuries and travelled throughout all of India, Bhutan, Tibet, and Ladakh teaching philosophy and yoga.

**Grihasta:** A married “householder;” the second stage (ashrama) in life.

**Guha:** Cave; secret; secret place; the heart (hridaya guha).

**Guna:** Quality, attribute, or characteristic arising from nature (Prakriti) itself;
a mode of energy behavior. As a rule, when “guna” is used it is in reference to the three qualities of Prakriti, the three modes of energy behavior that are the basic qualities of nature, and which determine the inherent characteristics of all created things. They are: 1) sattwa—purity, light, harmony; 2) rajas—activity, passion; and 3) tamas—dullness, inertia, and ignorance.

**Guru:** Teacher; preceptor; spiritual teacher or acharya.

**Guru Nanak:** Founder of the Sikh religion.

**Gurukula:** “Teacher’s school” or “teacher’s abode.” A gurukula is the residence of a spiritual teacher where young students (brahmacharis) came to live and learn.

**Hamsah:** “I am He;” swan.

**Hansa:** Swan; see Hamsah.

**Hanuman:** A powerful monkey chief of extraordinary strength and prowess, whose exploits are celebrated in the epic Ramayana, the life of Rama. He was an ideal devotee (bhakta) and servant of Lord Rama.

**Hara:** “One who takes away;” a title of Shiva; the destroyer; the remover.

**Hari:** Vishnu.

**Hatha Yoga:** A system consisting of physical exercises, postures, and breathing exercises for gaining control over the physical body and prana.

**Havan:** Fire sacrifice; yajna.

**Himsa:** Injury, violence; killing.

**Hiranyagarbha:** Cosmic intelligence; the Supreme Lord of the universe; also called Brahman.

**Holy Mother:** A reference to Sri Sarada Devi (Saradamani Mukhopadhyaya), the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, believed by many to have been an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

**Homa:** Vedic fire ritual/sacrifice.

**Hridaya:** Heart; center or core of something; essence; the Self.

**Ichcha:** Desire; will; wish; divine will; free will. From the verb root icch: “to wish,” “to will.”

**Ichcha shakti:** The power of desire; the power of the will; Shakti in the aspect of omnipotent Divine Will.
Ida: The subtle channel that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla on the left side of the spine.

Indra: King of the lesser “gods” (demigods).

Indriya: Organ. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. The five organs of action (karmendriyas) are the voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation.

Isha: The Lord; Ishwara.

Ishwara: “God” or “Lord” in the sense of the Supreme Power, Ruler, Master, or Controller of the cosmos. “Ishwara” implies the powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.

Ishwarapranidhana: Offering of one’s life to God (Ishwara).

Jada: Inert; unconscious; matter.


Jagat: World; cosmos.

Jagrata: The waking state.

Janaka: The royal sage (raja rishi) who was the king of Mithila and a liberated yogi, a highly sought-after teacher of philosophy in ancient India. Sita, the wife of Rama, was his adopted daughter.

Japa: Repetition of a mantra.

Jiva: Individual spirit.

Jivanmukta: One who is liberated here and now in this present life.

Jivanmuktii: Liberation in this life.

Jivatma(n): Individual spirit; individual consciousness.

Jnana: Knowledge; knowledge of Reality—of Brahman, the Absolute; also denotes the process of reasoning by which the Ultimate Truth is attained. The word is generally used to denote the knowledge by which one is aware of one’s identity with Brahman.

Jnana Marga: The path of discriminative knowledge leading to union with God.

Jnana Yoga: The path of knowledge; meditation through wisdom; constantly and seriously thinking on the true nature of the Self as taught by the upanishads.

Jnana-kanda: The parts of the Veda dealing with the knowledge of the Absolute
Brahman; the upanishads.

**Jnanamaya kosha:** “The sheath of intellect (buddhi).” The level of intelligent thought and conceptualization. Sometimes called the Vijnanamaya kosha. The astral-causal body.

**Jnanendriya:** The five organs of perception: ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose.

**Jnani:** A follower of the path of knowledge (jnana); one who has realized—who knows—the Truth (Brahman).

**Jyoti(h):** Light; flame; illumination; luminosity; effulgence.

**Kabir:** An Indian mystic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

**Kala:** Time measure, as in the time required to recite a mantra. It also sometimes means levels of creation or manifested beings.

**Kailash(a):** “Crystalline;” the name of the mountain home of Siva—a mountain peak in the Himalayas (in present-day Tibet) revered as the abode of Shiva, that is a famous place of pilgrimage.

**Kaivalya:** Transcendental state of Absolute Independence; state of absolute freedom from conditioned existence; moksha; isolation; final beatitude; emancipation.

**Kaivalya-mukti:** Liberation.

**Kama:** Desire; passion; lust.
Kapila: The great sage who formulated the Sankhya philosophy which is endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. (See the entry under Sankhya.)

Karana sharira: The causal body (where the individual rests during sound, deep, dreamless sleep, the intellect, mind and senses being reduced to an unmanifested potential condition), also known as the anandamaya kosha, the “sheath of bliss.”

Karma: Karma, derived from the Sanskrit root kri, which means to act, do, or make, means any kind of action, including thought and feeling. It also means the effects of action. Karma is both action and reaction, the metaphysical equivalent of the principle: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). It is karma operating through the law of cause and effect that binds the jiva or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death. There are three forms of karma: sanchita, agami, and prarabdha. Sanchita karma is the vast store of accumulated actions done in the past, the fruits of which have not yet been reaped. Agami karma is the action that will be done by the individual in the future. Prarabdha karma is the action that has begun to fructify, the fruit of which is being reaped in this life.

Karma Yoga: The Yoga of selfless (unattached) action; performance of one’s own duty; service of humanity.

Karma Yogi: One who practices karma yoga.

Karma-kanda: The ritual portion of the Veda. The philosophy that Vedic ritual is the only path to perfection.

Karma-kandi: One who follows the Karma-kanda as philosophy and practice.

Karmendriya: The five organs of action: voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation.

Karmic: Having to do with karma.

Karuna: Mercy; compassion; kindness.

Kashi: Varanasi (Benares).

Kaviraj: Ayurvedic physician.

Kevala: Oneness; absolute; alone; single; independent; perfect; uncompounded.

Kirtan: Singing the names and praises of God; devotional chanting.
**Klesha:** Literally, taints or afflictions. The kleshas are: ignorance, egotism, attractions and repulsions towards objects, and desperate clinging to physical life from the fear of death. (See Yoga Sutras 2:2-9.)

**Kosha:** Sheath; bag; scabbard; a sheath enclosing the soul; body. There are five such concentric sheaths or bodies: the sheaths of bliss, intellect, mind, life-force and the physical body—the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya and annamaya bodies respectively.

**Kripa:** Grace; mercy; compassion; blessing. There are three kinds of kripa: 1) sadhana kripa, the grace of self-effort; 2) guru kripa, the grace of a teacher, and 3) divya kripa, divine grace.

**Krishna:** A Divine Incarnation born in India about three thousand years ago, Whose teachings to His disciple Arjuna on the eve of the Great India (Mahabharata) War comprise the Bhagavad Gita.

**Kriya:** Purificatory action, practice, exercise, or rite; action; activity; movement; function; skill. Kriyas purify the body and nervous system as well as the subtle bodies to enable the yogi to reach and hold on to higher levels of consciousness and being.

**Kriya Shakti:** The power or faculty of action.

**Kriya Yoga:** The Yoga of Purification: “Austerity (tapasya), self-study (swadhyaya), and offering of the life to God (Ishwara pranidhana) are Kriya Yoga” (Yoga Sutras 2:1).

**Krodha:** Anger, wrath; fury.

**Kshama:** Forgiveness; patience; forbearance.

**Kshatriya:** A member of the ruler/warrior caste.

**Kumaras (Four):** Those advanced souls—Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata—who at the beginning of this creation cycle refused to engage in worldly life despite the command of Brahma. They were then taught by Lord Shiva, in the form of Dakshinamurti, the mysteries of Brahmajnana and attained liberation.

**Kumbhaka:** Retention of breath; suspension of breath.

**Kundalini:** The primordial cosmic energy located in the individual; it is usually thought of as lying coiled up like a serpent at the base of the spine.
**Glossary**

**Kutastha:** Immutable; absolutely changeless; not subject to change; literally: “summit abiding” or “on the summit.”

**Kutira:** Hut; cottage; house; building; hermitage.

**Lahiri Mahasaya:** Shyama Charan Lahiri, one of the greatest yogis of nineteenth-century India, written about extensively in Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramhansa Yogananda.

**Lakshmi:** The consort of Vishnu; the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

**Laya:** Dissolution; merging.

**Laya Yoga:** Process of absorption of the individual soul into the Supreme Soul; concentration of the mind with a view to dissolve it; that kind of yogic meditation where the mind is carried on progressively from grosser to subtler ideas until it is dissolved in the Unmanifested or Para Brahman; the yoga sometimes known as Omkaralayacintana—the merging of the consciousness into Om.

**Lila:** Play; sport; divine play; the cosmic play. The concept that creation is a play of the divine, existing for no other reason than for the mere joy of it. The life of an avatar is often spoken of as lila.

**Lobha:** Greed; covetousness.

**Loka:** World or realm; sphere, level, or plane of existence, whether physical, astral, or causal.

**Madhu:** Honey; sweet substance; sweet.

**Mahabharata:** The world’s longest epic poem (110,00 verses) about the Mahabharata (Great Indian) War that took place about three thousand years ago. The Mahabharata also includes the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular sacred text of Hinduism.

**Mahabhutas:** The Five Elements (Panchabhuta): ether (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (ap), and earth (prithvi).

**Mahadeva:** “The Great God;” a title of Shiva.

**Mahamantra:** “The Great Mantra,” popularly known in the United States and Europe as “the Hare Krishna Mantra”—Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare; Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare.
Mahamaya: “Great illusion;” divine Power operating as identified with the Supreme Lord. A title of Shakti, the Goddess.

Mahaprana: The undifferentiated, intelligent cosmic life-force that becomes the five pranas; all things contain the mahaprana and are manifestations of the mahaprana; the dynamic aspect of universal Consciousness; the superconscious Divine Life in all things.

Mahapralaya: The final cosmic dissolution; the dissolution of all the worlds of relativity (Bhuloka, Bhuvaloka, Swaloka, Mahaloka, Janaloka, Tapaloka, and Satyaloka), until nothing but the Absolute remains. There are lesser dissolutions, known simply as pralayas, when only the first five worlds (lokas) are dissolved.

Maharaj(a): “Great king;” lord; master; a title of respect used to address holy men.

Maharshi/Maharishi: Maha-rishi–great sage.

Mahasamadhi: Literally “the great union [samadhi],” this refers to a realized yogi’s conscious departure from the physical body at death.

Mahashakti: The Great Power; the divine creative energy.

Mahat Tattwa: The Great Principle; the first product from Prakriti in evolution; intellect. The principle of Cosmic Intelligence or Buddhi; universal Christ Consciousness, the “Son of God,” the “Only Begotten of the Father,” “the firstborn of every creature.”

Mahatma: Literally: “a great soul [atma].” Usually a designation for a sannyasi or a saint.

Mahavakya: Literally: “Great Saying.” The highest Vedantic truth, found in the Upanishads, there are four Mahavakyas: 1) Prajñanam Brahman—“Consciousness is Brahman” (Aitareya Upanishad); 2) Ayam Atma Brahma—“This Self is Brahman” (Mandukya Upanishad); 3) Tat Twam Asi—“Thou art That” (Chandogya Upanishad); 4) Aham Brahmasmi—“I am Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad).

Maheshwara: The Great Ishwara; Shiva.

Maitreya/Maitri: Friendliness; friendship; love.

Mala: Taint; impurity; defilement; defect; ignorance, limitation of consciousness.

266
Manana: Thinking, pondering, reflecting, considering.
Manas(a): The sensory mind; the perceiving faculty that receives the messages of the senses.
Manasic: Having to do with the mind (manas).
Manasarovar: A sacred lake near Mount Kailash the abode of Shiva. Pilgrims not only bathe in the lake on the way to Kailash, they often see visions in its water, hence the name “Lake of the Mind.” The present Dalai Lama was found through visions seen in Manasarovar.
Mandir(a): Temple; abode.
Mangala: Auspicious.
Manipura chakra: Energy center located in the spine at the point opposite the navel. Seat of the Fire element.
Mantra(m): Sacred syllable or word or set of words through the repetition and reflection of which one attains perfection or realization of the Self. Literally, “a transforming thought” (manat trayate). A mantra, then is a sound formula that transforms the consciousness.
Mantra Yoga: The Yoga of the Divine Word; the science of sound; the path to divine union through repetition of a mantra—a sound formula that transforms the consciousness.
Mantric: Having to do with mantra(s)—their sound or their power.
Manu: The ancient lawgiver, whose code, The Laws of Manu (Manu Smriti) is the foundation of Hindu religious and social conduct.
Manus: Progenitors of the human race who were also its lawgivers and teachers.
Manusha(m): Human being; humanity.
Mara: The embodiment of the power of cosmic evil, illusion, and delusion.
Marga: Way; path; street; approach to God-realization (bhakti marga, jnana marga, karma marga, yoga marga, etc.).
Math: A monastery.
Matsyendranath: Guru of Gorakhnath and the first publicly known Nath Yogi, having become a disciple of Adinath who is considered an avatar of
Shiva. As with Gorakhnath, we have no dates for him.

**Mauna(m):** Silence—not speaking.

**Maya:** The illusive power of Brahman; the veiling and the projecting power of the universe, the power of Cosmic Illusion. “The Measurer”—a reference to the two delusive “measures”: Time and Space.

**Mayic:** Having to do with Maya.

**Mimamsa:** An enquiry into the nature of a thing; the science of philosophical logic enquiring into Vedic knowledge. Usually a reference to Purva-Mimamsa, one of the six schools of orthodox Indian philosophy. It focuses on the Vedas and the Vedic rites to establish their supreme spiritual value and authority.

**Mirabai:** A sixteenth-century Rajasthani princess, whose devotional songs are among the greatest written in India.

**Moha:** Delusion—in relation to something, usually producing delusive attachment or infatuation based on a completely false perception and evaluation of the object.

**Moksha:** Release; liberation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience.

**Mudra:** A position—usually of the hands/fingers—which inherently produces a desired state in the subtle energy levels (prana).

**Mukta:** One who is liberated—freed—usually in the sense of one who has attained moksha or spiritual liberation.

**Mukti:** Moksha; liberation.

**Muladhara chakra:** “Seat of the root.” Energy center located at the base of the spine. Seat of the Earth element.

**Mulaprkriti:** The Root [Basic] Energy from which all things are formed. The Divine Prakriti or Energy of God.

**Mulashakti:** Root power or energy; Mulaprkriti.

**Mumukshu:** Seeker after liberation (moksha).

**Mumukshutwa:** Intense desire or yearning for liberation (moksha).

**Muni:** “Silent one” (one observing the vow of silence (mauna)); sage; ascetic.
**Glossary**

**Nada:** Sound; the resonance of sound; mystic inner sound; the primal sound or first vibration from which all creation has emanated; the first manifestation of the unmanifested Absolute; Omkara or Shabda Brahman; the inner sound of Om experienced in meditation.

**Nadi:** A channel in the subtle (astral) body through which subtle prana (psychic energy) flows; a physical nerve. Yoga treatises say that there are seventy-two thousand nadi in the energy system of the human being.

**Naga:** Snake.

**Nagas:** Astral beings that often interact with human beings, usually taking the form of snakes. (In Sanskrit naga is the word for snake.)

**Nanak (Guru):** Founder of the Sikh religion in the fifteenth century.

**Narada:** A primeval sage to whom some of the verses of the Rig Veda are attributed.

**Narayana:** A proper name of God—specifically of Vishnu. The term by etymology means a Being that supports all things, that is reached by them and that helps them to do so; also one who pervades all things. He Who dwells in man. Literally: “God in humanity.” Sadhus often address one another as Narayana and greet one another: “Namo Narayanaya”–I salute Narayana [in you].

**Nataraja:** “King of the Dance,” a title of Shiva the Cosmic Dancer. The whole creation is the dance of Shiva.

**Nath Yogis:** An ancient order of yogis, sometimes called Siddha Yogis, claiming Patanjali and Jesus (Isha Nath) among their master teachers.

**Neem Karoli Baba:** One of India’s most amazing and mysterious spiritual figures. The life of this great miracle-worker and master spanned from two to four centuries (at the least), including most of the twentieth century.

**Neti-neti:** “Not this, not this.” The way of describing the indescribable Brahman by enumerating what It is not; the analytical process of progressively negating all names and forms, in order to arrive at the eternal underlying Truth.

**Nidra:** Sleep; either dreaming or deep sleep state.

**Nirguna:** Without attributes or qualities (gunas).

**Nirguna Brahman:** The impersonal, attributeless Absolute beyond all
description or designation.

**Nirmala:** Without impurity; pure; without defect or blemish.

**Nirvana:** Liberation; final emancipation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death that comes from knowing Brahman; Absolute Experience. See Moksha.

**Nirvana chakra:** Energy center located beneath the crown of the head and opposite the middle of the forehead—in the midst of the brain.

**Nirvikalpa:** Indeterminate; non-conceptual; without the modifications of the mind; beyond all duality.

**Nirvikalpa samadhi:** Samadhi in which there is no objective experience or experience of “qualities” whatsoever, and in which the triad of knower, knowledge and known does not exist; purely subjective experience of the formless and qualitiless and unconditioned Absolute. The highest state of samadhi, beyond all thought, attribute, and description.

**Nishkama karma:** Desireless action; disinterested action; action dedicated to God without personal desire for the fruits of the action; selfless action.

**Nitya:** Eternal; permanent; unchanging; the ultimate Reality; the eternal Absolute. Secondly: daily or obligatory (nitya karma—that which must be done every day).

**Nityananda (Paramhansa):** A great Master of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the most renowned Nath Yogi of our times. His Chidaka-sha Gita contains some of the most profound statements on philosophy and yoga.

**Nivritti:** Negation; the path of turning away from activity; withdrawal. Literally, “to turn back.” The path of renunciation.

**Nivritti Marga:** The path of renunciation, of withdrawal from the world.

**Niyama:** Observance; the five Do’s of Yoga: 1) shaucha—purity, cleanliness; 2) santosha—contentment, peacefulness; 3) tapas—austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; 4) swadhyaya—self-study, spiritual study; 5) Ishwarapranidhana—offering of one’s life to God.

**Ojas:** Vitality; vigor; luster; splendor; energy; spiritual energy. The highest form of energy in the human body. In the spiritual aspirant who
constantly practices continence and purity, other forms of energy are transmuted into ojas and stored in the brain, manifesting as spiritual and intellectual power.

**Om:** The Pranava or the sacred syllable symbolizing and embodying Brahman.

**Omkara:** Om.

**Padmasana:** Lotus posture; considered the best posture for meditation.

**Panchabhuta:** The Five Elements (Mahabhuta): ether (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (ap), and earth (prithvi).

**Pandita:** Scholar; pundit; learned individual.

**Papa(m):** Sin; demerit; evil; sinful deeds; evil deeds.

**Para(m):** Highest; universal; transcendent; supreme.

**Parabrahman:** Supreme Brahman.

**Paramananda:** Supreme (param) bliss (ananda).

**Param[a]purusha:** See Purusha.

**Paramartha:** The highest attainment, purpose, or goal; absolute truth; Reality.

**Paramatma(n):** The Supreme Self, God.

**Parameshwara:** The supreme (param) Lord (eshwara; Ishwara).

**Paramhansa:** Literally: Supreme Swan, a person of the highest spiritual realization, from the fact that a swan can separate milk from water and is therefore an apt symbol for one who has discarded the unreal for the Real, the darkness for the Light, and mortality for the Immortal, having separated himself fully from all that is not God and joined himself totally to the Divine, becoming a veritable embodiment of Divinity manifested in humanity.

**Paramhansa Yogananda:** The most influential yogi of the twentieth century in the West, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship in America.

**Parampurusha:** The Supreme Spirit; Supreme Person.

**Paranirvana (Pali: Paranibbana):** The Supreme, Final Nirvana, when the perfectly enlightened individual is released from physical embodiment, never to return to birth in any world, high or low.

**Para-shakti:** Supreme Power.
Parivrajaka: “One who wanders;” a roaming ascetic; one who has renounced the world; a sannyasin.

Parvati: “Daughter of the Mountain;” the daughter of King Himalaya; the consort of Shiva; an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

Patanjali: A yogi of ancient India, the author of the Yoga Sutras.

Pingala: The subtle channel that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla on the right side of the spine.

Pitri: A departed ancestor, a forefather.

Pradhanā: Prakriti; causal matter.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prajñā: Consciousness; awareness; wisdom; intelligence.

Prajñānam Brahma: “Consciousness is Brahman.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Aitareya Upanishad.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prakāsh(a): Shining; luminous; effulgence; illumination; luminosity; light; brightness. Pure Consciousness, from the root kāsh (to shine) and pra (forth); cognition.

Prakriti: Causal matter; the fundamental power (shakti) of God from which the entire cosmos is formed; the root base of all elements; undifferentiated matter; the material cause of the world. Also known as Pradhana. Prakriti can also mean the entire range of vibratory existence (energy).

Prakritilaya: Absorbed or merged in Prakriti; the state of yogis who have so identified with the cosmic energy that they are trapped in it as though in a net and cannot separate themselves from it and evolve onwards until the cosmic dissolution (pralaya) occurs in which the lower worlds of men, angels, and archangels (bhur, bhuwah and swar lokas) are dissolved.

Pralaya: Dissolution. See Mahapralaya.

Pramana: Means of valid knowledge; logical proof; authority (of knowledge); means of cognition (from the verb root ma–to measure and pra–before or forward.

Prana: Life; vital energy; life-breath; life-force; inhalation. In the human body the prana is divided into five forms: 1) Prana, the prana that moves upward;
2) Apana: The prana that moves downward, producing the excretory functions in general. 3) Vyana: The prana that holds prana and apana together and produces circulation in the body. 4) Samana: The prana that carries the grosser material of food to the apana and brings the subtler material to each limb; the general force of digestion. 5) Udana: The prana which brings up or carries down what has been drunk or eaten; the general force of assimilation.

**Pranamaya kosha:** “The sheath of vital air (prana).” The sheath consisting of vital forces and the (psychic) nervous system.

**Pranava:** A title of Om, meaning “Life-ness” or “Life-Giver.” Om is the expression or controller of prana—the life force within the individual being and the cosmos.

**Pranayama:** Control of the subtle life forces, often by means of special modes of breathing. Therefore breath control or breathing exercises are usually mistaken for pranayama. It also means the refining (making subtle) of the breath, and its lengthening through spontaneous slowing down of the respiratory rate.

**Prarabdha:** Karma that has become activated and begun to manifest and bear fruit in this life; karmic “seeds” that have begun to “sprout.”

**Prasad(am):** Grace; food or any gift that has been first offered in worship or to a saint; that which is given by a saint. It also means tranquillity, particularly in the Bhagavad Gita.

**Pratyahara:** Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses from their objects, the fifth limb of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga.

**Pravritti:** Action; endeavor. Literally: “to turn forth.”

**Pravritti Marga:** The path of active involvement in the world.

**Prayag:** Rudraprayag, the modern-day Allahabad, site of the Triveni—the confluence of the three sacred rivers: Ganges, Jumna (Yamuna), and Saraswati.

**Prayaschitta:** Atonement (through various prescribed acts); expiation; mortification.

**Prema:** Love; divine love (for God).

**Prema-bhakti:** Intense love of God.
Premeshananda, Swami: Affectionately known as “Premesh Maharaj,” Swami Premeshananda was a disciple of Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and a renowned monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

Preta: Ghost; spirit of the dead.

Puja: Worship; ceremonial (ritual) worship; adoration; honor. Usually involving the image of a deity.

Pujari: One who performs ritualistic worship (puja).


Pundit: Scholar; pandita; learned individual.

Punya: Merit; virtue; meritorious acts; virtuous deeds. See Apunya.

Puraka: Inhalation.

Purna: Full; complete.

Purusha: “Person” in the sense of a conscious spirit. Both God and the individual spirits are purushas, but God is the Adi (Original, Archetypal) Purusha, Parama (Highest) Purusha, and the Purushottama (Highest or Best of the Purushas).

Purushartha: The four goals of human life: wealth (artha), desire (kama), righteousness (dharma), and liberation (moksha). The first is the economic value, the second is the psychological value, the third is the moral value, and the fourth is the spiritual value. Human effort; individual exertion; right exertion

Purushottama: The Supreme Person; Supreme Purusha. (See Purusha.)

Raga: Attachment/affinity for something, implying a desire for it. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple liking or preference to intense desire and attraction. Greed; passion. See Dwesha.

Raga-dwesha: The continual cycle of desire/aversion, like/dislike.

Raja Yoga: See Ashtanga Yoga.

Rajarshi: “Royal sage;” a king who knows Brahman; an epithet of King Janaka.

Rajas: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal.

Rajasic: Possessed of the qualities of the raja guna (rajas). Passionate; active; restless.

Rajoguna: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal.
Rakshasa: There are two kinds of rakshasas: 1) semidivine, benevolent beings, or 2) cannibal demons or goblins, enemies of the gods. Meat-eating human beings are sometimes classed as rakshasas.

Ram: A title of Brahman the Absolute. Though sometimes used as a contraction of the name of Rama, many yogis insist that it is properly applied to Brahman alone and employ it as a mantra in repetition and meditation to reveal the Absolute. Interestingly, Ram (Rahm) is also a title of God in Hebrew.

Rama: An incarnation of God—the king of ancient Ayodhya in north-central India. His life is recorded in the ancient epic Ramayana.

Rama Tirtha: One of the key spiritual figures in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. A former university professor of mathematics in the Punjab, Swami Rama Tirtha traveled throughout India and even to Japan and America, preaching the truths of Advaita Vedanta and vigorously teaching the practice of Om Yoga.

Ramakrishna, Sri: Sri Ramakrishna lived in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is regarded by all India as a perfectly enlightened person—and by many as an Incarnation of God.

Ramana Maharshi: A great sage of the twentieth century who lived in Arunachala in South India. He taught the path of Self-Inquiry (Atma Vichara) wherein the person simply turns his awareness within with the unspoken question—the attitude—of “Who am I?” until the self (atma) is revealed.

Ramanuja (Sri): The great Vaishnava teacher of the eleventh century who formulated the philosophy known as Vishishtadvaita Vedanta (Qualified Non-Dualism).

Ramdas (Swami): One of the best-known and most influential spiritual figures of twentieth-century India, founder of Anandashram in South India and author of the spiritual classic In the Vision of God as well as many other inspirational books.

Rasa: Taste; essence; savor; juice; nectar of delight.

Rechaka: Exhalation of breath.
**Rig Veda:** The oldest scripture of India, considered the oldest scripture of the world, that consists of hymns revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis (seers). Although in modern times there are said to be four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), in actuality, there is only one Veda: the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda is only a collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. The Yajur Veda is a small book giving directions on just one form of Vedic sacrifice. The Atharva Veda is only a collection of theurgical mantras to be recited for the cure of various afflictions or to be recited over the herbs to be taken as medicine for those afflictions.

**Rik (or Ric):** A hymn, usually a hymn of the Rig Veda.

**Rishi:** Sage; seer of the Truth.

**Rita(m):** Truth; Law; Right; Order. The natural order of things, or Cosmic Order/Law. Its root is ri, which means “to rise, to tend upward.” It is said to be the basis for the Law of Karma.

**Rudra:** Shiva. Derived from rud–he who drives away sin or suffering.

**Rupa:** Form; body.

**Sabija:** “With seed;” with attributes; producing samskaras or subtle karmas.

**Sabija samadhi:** Savikalpa samadhi wherein the seeds of samskaras or karmas are not destroyed, and which produces the highest and subtlest of samskaras or karmas.

**Sad-darshanas:** The six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy: Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta.

**Sadhaka:** One who practices spiritual discipline–sadhana–particularly meditation.

**Sadhana:** Spiritual practice.

**Sadhana-chatushtaya:** The fourfold aids to spiritual practice: 1) the ability to discriminate between the transient and the eternal (nitya-anity-astu-viveka); 2) the absence of desire for securing pleasure or pain either here or elsewhere (iha-anutra-artha-phala-vairagya); 3) the attainment of calmness, temperance, spirit of renunciation, fortitude, power of concentration of mind, and faith (shama-damadi-sadhana-smaptti); 4) an intense desire for liberation (mumukshutwa).
Sadhu: Seeker for truth (sat); a person who is practicing spiritual disciplines. Usually this term is applied only to monastics.

Saguna: Possessing attributes or qualities (gunas).

Saguna Brahman: Brahman with attributes, such as mercy, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.; the Absolute conceived as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe; also the Personal God according to the Vedanta.

Sahaja: Natural; innate; spontaneous; inborn.

Sahasrara: The “thousand-petalled lotus” of the brain. The highest center of consciousness, the point at which the spirit (atma) and the bodies (koshas) are integrated and from which they are disengaged.

Sai Baba: See Shirdi Sai Baba.

Sakshatakara: Self-realization; direct experience; experience of Absoluteness; Brahmajnana.

Sakshi(n): The witness self; the kutashtha which passively observes the actions of the body and the senses; seer; the intuitive faculty.

Sama Veda: A collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. It is sometimes spoken of as the “essence” of the Rig Veda.

Samadarshana: Equal vision; seeing all things equally; equal-sightedness; equanimity.

Samadhi: The state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced attended with all-knowledge and joy; Oneness; here the mind becomes identified with the object of meditation; the meditator and the meditated, thinker and thought become one in perfect absorption of the mind. See Samprajñata Samadhi, Asamprajñata Samadhi, Savikalpa Samadhi, and Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Samadrishti: See Samadarshana.

Samana: The prana the carries the grosser material of food to the apana and brings the subtler material to each limb; the general force of digestion.

Sampradaya: Tradition; philosophical school; literally: “handed-down instruction;” also a line of initiatic empowerment.

Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life.
Samsaric: Having to do with samsara; involved with samsara; partaking of the traits or qualities of samsara.

Samsarin: One who is subject to samsara—repeated births and deaths—and who is deluded by its appearances, immersed in ignorance.

Samskara: Impression in the mind, either conscious or subconscious, produced by previous action or experience in this or previous lives; propensities of the mental residue of impressions; subliminal activators; prenatal tendency. See Vasana.

Sanatana: Eternal; everlasting; ancient; primeval.


Sandhya: A ritual done at the “junctions” (sandhyas) of the day—dawn, noon, and sunset—during which the Savitri Gayatri is repeated.

Sankalpa: A life-changing wish, desire, volition, resolution, will, determination, or intention—not a mere momentary aspiration, but an empowering act of will that persists until the intention is fully realized. It is an act of spiritual, divine creative will inherent in each person as a power of the Atma.

Sankhya: One of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy whose originator was the sage Kapila, Sankhya is the original Vedic philosophy, endorsed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (Gita 2:39; 3:3,5; 18:13,19), the second chapter of which is entitled “Sankhya Yoga.” A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook says: “Sankhya postulates two ultimate realities, Purusha and Prakriti. Declaring that the cause of suffering is man’s identification of Purusha with Prakriti and its products, Sankhya teaches that liberation and true knowledge are attained in the supreme consciousness, where such identification ceases and Purusha is realized as existing independently in its transcendental nature.” Not surprisingly, then, Yoga is based on the Sankhya philosophy.


Sannyasi(n): A renunciate; a monk.

Sannyasini: A female renunciate; a nun.
Sanskrit: The language of the ancient sages of India and therefore of the Indian scriptures and yoga treatises.

Santosha: Contentment; peacefulness.

Sarada Devi ("Holy Mother"): The virgin-wife of Sri Ramakrishna, and a great teacher in her own right, considered by many to be an incarnation of the Mother aspect of God.

Saraswati: The goddess of speech, wisdom, learning and the arts—particularly music.

Sarva: All; everything; complete.

Sarvajña(twa): Knowing everything; omniscience.

Sat: Existence; reality; truth; being; a title of Brahman, the Absolute or Pure Being.

Satchidananda: Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; Brahman.


Satya(m): Truth; the Real; Brahman, or the Absolute; truthfulness; honesty.

Satya Loka: "True World," "World of the True [Sat]," or "World of Truth [Satya]." This highest realm of relative existence where liberated beings live who have not entered back into the Transcendent Absolute where there are no “worlds” (lokas). From that world they can descend and return to other worlds for the spiritual welfare of others, as can those that have chosen to return to the Transcendent.

Satya Yuga: See Yuga.

Sattwa: Light; purity; harmony, goodness, reality.

Sattwa Guna: Quality of light, purity, harmony, and goodness.

Sattwic: Partaking of the quality of Sattwa.

Savikalpa Samadhi: Samadhi in which there is objective experience or experience of “qualities” and with the triad of knower, knowledge and known; lesser samadhi; cognitive samadhi; samadhi of wisdom; meditation with limited external awareness. Samprajña(ta) samadhi.

Seva: Service; selfless service.

Shabda: Sound; word.

Shabda Brahman: Sound-God; Brahman in the Form of Sound; Omkara; the Vedas.
Om Yoga Meditation: Its Theory and Practice

Shabdakshara: “Sound-syllable;” Om.
Shaiva/Shaivite: A worshipper of Shiva; pertaining to Shiva.
Shakti: Power; energy; force; the Divine Power of becoming; the apparent dynamic aspect of Eternal Being; the Absolute Power or Cosmic Energy; the Divine Feminine.
Shankara (2): Shankaracharya; Adi (the first) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 300 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order.
Shama: Calmness; tranquility; control of the internal sense organs; same; equal.
Shanta: One who possesses shanti.
Shanti: Peace; calm; tranquility; contentment.
Sharanam: Refuge; protection, shelter.
Sharira: Body; sheath; literally: “that which perishes,” from the root shri which means “to waste away.”
Shastra: Scripture; spiritual treatise.
Shastri: One who is a scholar and teacher of the scriptures (shastras).
Shaucha: Purity; cleanliness.
Shirdi Sai Baba: Perhaps the most renowned spiritual teacher of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India. His fame continues to grow in this century as well.
Shiva: A name of God meaning “One Who is all Bliss and the giver of happiness to all.” Although classically applied to the Absolute Brahman, Shiva can also refer to God (Ishwara) in His aspect of Dissolver and Liberator (often mistakenly thought of as “destroyer”).
Shraddha: Faith; confidence or assurance that arises from personal experience.
Shruti: That which is heard; revealed scripture in the sense of divine communication. Usually applied to the Vedas, Shankara also spoke of the Upanishads as Shruti.
Shuddha: Pure; clear; clean; untainted.
**Glossary**

**Shuddhi:** The state of purity (shuddha); purification.

**Shudra:** A member of the laborer, servant caste.

**Shunya:** Void; no-thing; emptiness.

**Shyama Charan Lahiri:** See Lahiri Mahasaya.

**Siddha:** A perfected–liberated–being, an adept, a seer, a perfect yogi.

**Siddhaloka:** The highest realm of existence in which the fully liberated (siddhas) live. (However, wherever a siddha is, that place is siddhaloka.)

**Siddhi:** Spiritual perfection; psychic power; power; modes of success; attainment; accomplishment; achievement; mastery; supernatural power attained through mantra, meditation, or other yogic practices. From the verb root sidh—to attain.

**Sivananda (Swami):** A great twentieth-century Master, founder of the worldwide Divine Life Society, whose books on spiritual life and religion are widely circulated in the West as well as in India.

**Sloka:** A Sanskrit verse. Usually it consists of two lines of sixteen syllables each, or four lines of eight syllables each.

**Smarana:** Remembrance (of God).

**Smriti:** Memory; recollection; “that which is remembered.” In this latter sense, Smriti is used to designate all scriptures except the Vedas and Upanishads (which are considered of greater authority).

**Spanda:** Vibration; expanding vibration; flutter; throb; movement; creative shakti; pulsation; creative pulsation; apparent motion in the motionless Shiva which brings about the manifestation, maintenance, and withdrawal of the universe; the principle of apparent movement from the state of absolute unity to the plurality of the world.

**Sphurana:** Vibration.

**Sri:** Holy; sacred; excellent; venerated (venerable); revered; a term of respect similar to “Reverend.” Also: prosperity, glory, and success—and therefore an epithet for Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and abundance, the consort of Vishnu. It is often used as an honorific prefix to the name of deities and holy persons to indicate holiness (Sri Krishna, Sri Swami N., etc.). Also used as the equivalent of the English “Mr.” (Srimati would be the equivalent of “Mrs.”)
**Sri Yantra:** The mystical diagram showing the movement of the spiritual energies inherent in and produced by the supreme mantra: Om. The Sri Yantra has also come to be identified with the energy-power of the Divine Mother, and if often worshipped by her devotees.

**Sri Yukteswar Giri, Swami:** The guru of Paramhansa Yogananda.

**Sruti:** Sacred scripture. The Vedas and Upanishads.

**Sthirata (Sthirattwa):** Steadiness or firmness of body or mind; the steady tranquillity born of meditation.

**Sthitaprajna:** One who is established in the divine Consciousness or superconsciousness.

**Sthiti:** Steadiness; condition or state; existence; being; subsistence; preservation.

**Sthula:** Gross material; physical entity; atomic matter.

**Sthula-sharira:** Gross body; physical body; body of atomic matter.

**Sukha(m):** Happiness; ease; joy; happy; pleasant; agreeable.

**Sukshma:** Subtle; fine.

**Sukshma-sharira:** Subtle body; astral body (also called linga sharira).

**Sura:** Divine being; deva; one who is filled with light.

**Surya:** The sun; the presiding deity of the sun, sometimes identified with Vishnu (Surya-Narayana) or the Absolute Brahman.

**Sushumna:** A subtle passage in the midst of the spinal column, corresponding to the spinal cord, that extends from the base of the spine to the medulla oblongata in the head.

**Sushupti:** The dreamless sleep state.

**Sutra:** Literally: a thread; an aphorism with minimum words and maximum sense; a terse sentence; in Buddhism, an entire scripture.

**Sutratma:** “The thread-Self;” immanent deity of the totality of the subtle bodies, referring to the Gita verse: “On Me all this universe is strung like pearls on a thread” (7:7).

**Swabhava:** One’s own inherent disposition, nature, or potentiality; inherent state of mind; state of inner being.

**Swadharma:** One’s own natural (innate) duty (dharma, based on their karma
and samskara. One’s own prescribed duty in life according to the eternal law (ritam).

**Swadhishthana chakra:** Energy center located in the spine a little less than midway between the base of the spine and the area opposite the navel. Seat of the Water element.

**Swadhyaya:** Introspective self-study or self-analysis leading to self-understanding. Study of spiritual texts regarding the Self.

**Swami:** Literally, “I am mine”–in the sense of absolute self-mastership. It could be legitimately translated: “He who is one with his Self [Swa].” It is often used in the sense of “lord” or owner as well as a spiritual guide or authority. God Himself is the ultimate Swami. As a matter of respect it is always used in reference to sannyasis, since they have vowed themselves to pursue the knowledge of the Self, or those considered to be of spiritual advancement.

**Swapna:** The dream state; a dream.

**Swara:** Sound; accent; tone.

**Swarupa:** “Form of the Self.” Natural–true–form; actual or essential nature; essence. A revelatory appearance that makes clear the true nature of some thing.

**Swayamprakash(a):** Self-luminous; self-illumined.

**Taimni, I. K.:** A professor of chemistry in India. He wrote many excellent books on philosophy and spiritual practice, including The Science of Yoga, a commentary on the Yoga Sutras. For many years he was the spiritual head of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society headquartered in Adyar, Madras (Tamilnadu), and traveled the world without publicity or notoriety, quietly instructing many sincere aspirants in the path to supreme consciousness.

**Talu chakra:** Energy center located at the root of the palate opposite the tip of the nose.

**Tamas:** Dullness, darkness, inertia, folly, and ignorance.

**Tamasic:** Possessed of the qualities of the tamo guna (tamas). Ignorant; dull; inert; and dark.

**Tanha:** Craving; desire; thirst.
Tantra: A manual of or a particular path of sadhana laying great stress upon japa of a mantra and other esoteric practices relating to the powers latent in the human complex of physical, astral, and causal bodies in relation to the cosmic Power usually thought as the Divine Feminine.

Tantric: Pertaining to Tantra.

Tapa: Trouble; acute anxiety; anguish; suffering.

Tapa Loka: The world of tapasya; the world beyond rebirth where adept yogis perpetually engage in tapasya (yoga) until they attain liberation and pass upward into Satya Loka, the realm of the liberated ones who know Brahman.

Tapas: See tapasya.

Tapasya: Austerity; practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; spiritual force. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds, the burning up of karma.

Tat Twam Asi: “Thou art That.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Chandogya Upanishad.

Tattwa: “Thatness.” Principle; element; the essence of things; truth; reality.

Tejas: Radiance; brilliancy (especially spiritual); the element of fire; Agni; heat.

Tejomaya: Full of tejas; full of light; resplendent.

Thakur: “Master” or “Lord.” A reference to God or to a holy person considered to be one with God.

Tirtha: A sacred place of pilgrimage; a river or body of water in which it is auspicious and spiritually beneficial to bathe; the water offered in ritual worship and then sprinkled on or drunk by the devotees.

Treta Yuga: See Yuga.

Triguna: The three gunas or qualities: sattwa, rajas, and tamas. (See the entry under Guna).

Trigunatita: Beyond the three gunas.

Trimurti: “The three forms”–Brahman, Vishnu, and Shiva, the Hindu “Trinity.”

Trishna: Thirst; craving; desire.

Tukaram: A poet-saint of seventeenth century India (Maharashtra) devoted to Krishna in his form of Panduranga (Vittala).
Glossary

Turiya: The state of pure consciousness. *A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook* defines it as: “The superconscious; lit., ‘the Fourth,’ in relation to the three ordinary states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep—which it transcends.”

Tyaga: Literally: “abandonment.” Renunciation—in the Gita, the relinquishment of the fruit of action.

Tyagi: A renouncer, an ascetic.

Udana: The prana which brings up or carries down what has been drunk or eaten; the general force of assimilation.

Udgitha: The Pranava [Om] when it is sung aloud in Vedic recitation.

Upadesha: Spiritual instruction.

Upadhi: Adjunct; association; superimposed thing or attribute that veils and gives a colored view of the substance beneath it; limiting adjunct; instrument; vehicle; body; a technical term used in Vedanta philosophy for any superimposition that gives a limited view of the Absolute and makes It appear as the relative.

Upanishads: Books (of varying lengths) of the philosophical teachings of the ancient sages of India on the knowledge of Absolute Reality. The upanishads contain two major themes: (1) the individual self (Atman) and the Supreme Self (Paramatman) are one in essence, and (2) the goal of life is the realization/manifestation of this unity, the realization of God (Brahman). There are eleven principal upanishads: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Shvetashvatara, all of which were commented on by Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhavacharya, thus setting the seal of authenticity on them.

Upasana: “Sitting near” or “drawing near;” worship; adoration; contemplation of God or deity; devout meditation; both teaching and learning.

Urdhvareta yogi: A yogi in whom the seminal energy flows upwards.

Vachaka: That which is denoted by speech.

Vachya: That which is denoted by speech.

Vaikhari: Sound that is spoken and heard.

Vairagi: A renunciate.
Vairagya: Non-attachment; detachment; dispassion; absence of desire; disinterest; or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments.

Vaishya: A member of the merchant, farmer, artisan, businessman caste.

Vak: Speech.

Vakya: Word or statement.

Vanaprastha: Literally: a forest dweller. The third stage of life (ashrama) in which, leaving home and children, the husband and wife dwell together in seclusion and contemplation as a preparation to taking sannyasa.

Varna: Caste. (Literally: color.) In traditional Hindu society there were four divisions or castes according to the individual’s nature and aptitude: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra.

Vasana: A bundle or aggregate of similar samskaras. Subtle desire; a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment; it induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment; the subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action; it is the cause of birth and experience in general; the impression of actions that remains unconsciously in the mind.

Veda: Knowledge, wisdom, revealed scripture. See Vedas.

Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. The original text of this school is Vedanta-darshana, the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa.

Vedanta Sutras: The Brahma Sutras.

Vedantin: A follower of Vedanta.

Vedas: The oldest scriptures of India, considered the oldest scriptures of the world, that were revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis (seers). Although in modern times there are said to be four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), in the Upanishads only three are listed (Rig, Sama, and Yajur). In actuality, there is only one Veda: the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda is only a collection of Rig Veda hymns that are marked (pointed) for singing. The
Yajur Veda is a small book giving directions on just one form of Vedic sacrifice. The Atharva Veda is only a collection of theurgical mantras to be recited for the cure of various afflictions or to be recited over the herbs to be taken as medicine for those afflictions.

**Vedic**: Having to do with the Vedas.

**Vidya**: Knowledge; both spiritual knowledge and mundane knowledge.

**Vijnana**: The highest knowledge, beyond mere theoretical knowledge (jnana); transcendental knowledge or knowing; experiential knowledge; a high state of spiritual realization—intimate knowledge of God in which all is seen as manifestations of Brahman; knowledge of the Self.

**Vijnani**: One endowed with vijnana.

**Vikshepa**: The projecting power of the mind, causing external involvement; the movement of pushing outward or away; the projecting power of ignorance; mental restlessness resulting from the awareness moving out from the center that is the Self; Distractions; causes of distractions; projection; false projection; the tossing of the mind which obstructs concentration.

**Vimala**: Purity; unblemished; without stain or defect.

**Virya**: Strength; power; energy; courage.

**Vishishtadvaita Vedanta**: The philosophy of Qualified Non-Dualism formulated by Sri Ramanuja.

**Vishnu**: “The all-pervading;” God as the Preserver.

**Vishuddha**: Supremely pure; totally pure.

**Vishuddha chakra**: “Supreme purity.” Energy center located in the spine opposite the hollow of the throat. Seat of the Ether element.

**Vishwaprana**: The universal life force (prana).

**Viveka**: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination.

**Vivekananda (Swami)**: The chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who brought the message of Vedanta to the West at the end of the nineteenth century.

**Vritra**: One who hates the light and burrows into the dark; a symbolic term
used in the Vedas for those of low and bound consciousness who are the opposite of the Aryans.

**Vritti:** Thought-wave; mental modification; mental whirlpool; a ripple in the chitta (mind substance).

**Vyana:** The prana that holds prana and apana together and produces circulation in the body.

**Vyasa:** One of the greatest sages of India, commentator on the Yoga Sutras, author of the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita), the Brahma Sutras, and the codifier of the Vedas.

**Yajna:** Sacrifice; offering; sacrificial ceremony; a ritual sacrifice; usually the fire sacrifice known as agnihotra or havan.

**Yama:** Restraint; the five Don'ts of Yoga: 1) ahimsa—non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness; 2) satya—truthfulness, honesty; 3) asteya—non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness; 4) brahmacharya—continence; 5) aparigraha—non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

**Yantra:** Geometrical designs of the energy patterns made by mantras when they are recited or which, when concentrated on produce the effects of the corresponding mantras. Though often attributed to deities, they are really the diagrams of the energy movements of those deities’ mantras.

**Yati:** Wanderer; a wandering ascetic.

**Yoga:** Literally, “joining” or “union” from the Sanskrit root yuj. Union with the Supreme Being, or any practice that makes for such union. Meditation that unites the individual spirit with God, the Supreme Spirit. The name of the philosophy expounded by the sage Patanjali, teaching the process of union of the individual with the Universal Soul.

**Yoga Darshana:** See Yoga Sutras.

**Yoga Maya:** The power of Maya, of divine illusion. It is Maya in operation, the operation/movement rising from the presence (union—yoga) of God (Ishwara) within it, and therefore possessing delusive power.

**Yoga Nidra:** A state of half-contemplation and half-sleep; light yogic sleep when the individual retains slight awareness; state between sleep and wakefulness.

**Yoga Sutras:** The oldest known writing on the subject of yoga, written by the
sage Patanjali, a yogi of ancient India, and considered the most authoritative text on yoga. Also known as Yoga Darshana, it is the basis of the Yoga Philosophy which is based on the philosophical system known as Sankhya.

**Yoga Vashishtha**: A classical treatise on Yoga, containing the instructions of the Rishi Vashishta to Lord Rama on meditation and spiritual life.

**Yogabhrashta**: One who has fallen from the practice of Yoga.

**Yogananda (Paramhansa)**: The most influential yogi of the twentieth century in the West, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi* and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship in America.

**Yogi**: One who practices Yoga; one who strives earnestly for union with God; an aspirant going through any course of spiritual discipline.

**Yogic**: Having to do with Yoga.

**Yogini**: A female practitioner of yoga.

**Yogiraj**: “King of Yogis,” a title often given to an advanced yogi, especially a teacher of yoga.

**Yuga**: Age or cycle; aeon; world era. Hindus believe that there are four yugas: the Golden Age (Satya or Krita Yuga), the Silver age (Treta Yuga), The Bronze Age (Dwapara Yuga), and the Iron Age (Kali Yuga). Satya Yuga is four times as long as the Kali Yuga; Treta Yuga is three times as long; and Dwapara Yuga is twice as long. In the Satya Yuga the majority of humans use the total potential—four-fourths—of their minds; in the Treta Yuga, three-fourths; in the Dwapara Yuga, one half; and in the Kali Yuga, one fourth. (In each Yuga there are those who are using either more or less of their minds than the general populace.) The Yugas move in a perpetual circle: Ascending Kali Yuga, ascending Dwapara Yuga, ascending Treta Yuga, ascending Satya Yuga, descending Satya Yuga, descending, Treta Yuga, descending Dwapara Yuga, and descending Kali Yuga—over and over. Furthermore, there are yuga cycles within yuga cycles. For example, there are yuga cycles that affect the entire cosmos, and smaller yuga cycles within those greater cycles that affect a solar system. The cosmic yuga cycle takes 8,640,000,000 years, whereas the solar yuga cycle only takes 24,000 years. At the present time our solar system is in the ascending Dwapara
Yoga, but the cosmos is in the descending Kali Yuga. Consequently, the more the general mind of humanity develops, the more folly and evil it becomes able to accomplish.
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About the Author

Abbot George Burke (Swami Nirmalananda Giri) is the founder and director of the Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA.

In his many pilgrimages to India, he had the opportunity of meeting some of India’s greatest spiritual figures, including Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Anandamayi Ma. During his first trip to India he was made a member of the ancient Swami Order by Swami Vidyananda Giri, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, who had himself been given sannyas by the Shankaracharya of Puri, Jagadguru Bharati Krishna Tirtha.

In the United States he also encountered various Christian saints, including Saint John Maximovich of San Francisco and Saint Philaret Voznesensky of New York. He was ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church (International) to the priesthood on January 25, 1974, and consecrated a bishop on August 23, 1975.

For many years Abbot George has researched the identity of Jesus Christ and his teachings with India and Sanatana Dharma, including Yoga. It is his conclusion that Jesus lived in India for most of his life, and was a yogi and Sanatana Dharma missionary to the West. After his resurrection he returned to India and lived the rest of his life in the Himalayas.

He has written extensively on these and other topics, many of which are posted at OCOY.org.
Light of the Spirit Monastery is an esoteric Christian monastic community for those men who seek direct experience of the Spirit through meditation, sacramental worship, discipline and dedicated communal life, emphasizing the inner reality of “Christ in you the hope of glory,” as taught by the illumined mystics of East and West.

The public outreach of the monastery is through its website, OCOY.org (Original Christianity and Original Yoga). There you will find many articles on Original Christianity and Original Yoga, including *Esoteric Christian Beliefs*, *Foundations of Yoga* and *How to Be a Yogi* are practical guides for anyone seriously interested in living the Yoga Life.

You will also discover many other articles on leading an effective spiritual life, including *The Yoga of the Sacraments* and *Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet*, as well as the “Dharma for Awakening” series—in-depth commentaries on these spiritual classics: the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tao Teh King and the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Recently added are a series of podcasts by Abbot George on meditation, the Yoga Life, and remarkable spiritual people he has met in India and elsewhere, at http://ocoy.org/podcasts/
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Light of the Spirit Press presents books on spiritual wisdom and Original Christianity and Original Yoga. From our “Dharma for Awakening” series (practical commentaries on the world’s scriptures) to books on how to meditate and live a successful spiritual life, you will find books that are informative, helpful, and even entertaining.

Light of the Spirit Press is the publishing house of Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA. Our books feature the writings of the founder and director of the monastery, Abbot George Burke (Swami Nirmalananda Giri) which are also found on the monastery’s website, OCOY.org.

We invite you to explore our publications in the following pages.

Find out more about our publications at lightofthespiritpress.com
The Christ of India
The Story of Saint Thomas Christianity

There is a strong connection between Jesus and India, both historically and philosophically. And his disciple, Saint Thomas, who was the apostle of India, built upon the foundation of that connection. The result is that unique form of Christianity known as Saint Thomas Christianity.

In *The Christ of India*, Abbot George Burke presents the growing evidence that Jesus spent much of his “Lost Years” in India and Tibet, and reveals the philosophical unity of Jesus’ teachings with the Eternal Way of Truth known in India as Sanatana Dharma. Also includes the history of Saint Thomas Christianity from the times of Jesus and Saint Thomas to the present day

What Readers say:

“Abbot George is like the Emily Dickinson of modern day spiritual writers.” – Reverend Gerry Nangle

“Interpreting the teachings of Jesus from the perspective of Santana Dharma, The Christ of India is a knowledgeable yet engaging collection of authentic details and evident manuscripts about the Essene roots of Jesus and his ‘Lost years’. ...delightful to read and a work of substance, vividly written and rich in historical analysis, this is an excellent work written by a masterful teacher and a storyteller.” – Enas Reviews
The Dhammapada for Awakening

A Commentary on Buddha’s Practical Wisdom

The Dhammapada for Awakening brings a refreshing and timely perspective to ancient wisdom and shows seekers of inner peace practical ways to improve their inner lives today.

It explores the Buddha’s answers to the urgent questions, such as “How can I find lasting peace, happiness and fulfillment that seems so elusive?” and “What can I do to avoid many of the miseries big and small that afflict all of us?”

Drawing on the proven wisdom of different ancient traditions, and the contemporary masters of spiritual life, as well as his own studies and first-hand knowledge of the mystical traditions of East and West, Abbot George illumines the practical wisdom of Buddha in the Dhammapada, and more importantly, and make that teaching relevant to present day spiritual seekers.

What Readers say:

“In this compelling book, Abbot George Burke brings his considerable knowledge and background in Christian teachings and the Vedic tradition of India to convey a practical understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. ...This is a book you’ll want to take your time to read and keep as reference to reread. Highly recommended for earnest spiritual aspirants” — Anna Hourihan, author, editor, and publisher at Vedanta Shores Press
May a Christian Believe in Reincarnation?

Discover the real and surprising history of reincarnation and Christianity.

A growing number of people are open to the subject of past lives, and the belief in rebirth–reincarnation, metempsychosis, or transmigration–is becoming commonplace. It often thought that belief in reincarnation and Christianity are incompatible. But is this really true? May a Christian believe in reincarnation? The answer may surprise you.

Reincarnation–also known as the transmigration of souls–is not just some exotic idea of non-Christian mysticism. Nor is it an exclusively Hindu-Buddhist teaching.

In orthodox Jewish and early Christian writings, as well as the Holy Scriptures, we find reincarnation as a fully developed belief, although today it is commonly ignored. But from the beginning it has been an integral part of Orthodox Judaism, and therefore as Orthodox Jews, Jesus and his Apostles would have believed in rebirth.

What Readers say:

“Those needing evidence that a belief in reincarnation is in accordance with teachings of the Christ need look no further: Plainly laid out and explained in an intelligent manner from one who has spent his life on a Christ-like path of renunciation and prayer/meditation.”

—Christopher T. Cook
This Sanskrit glossary contains full translations and explanations of many of the most commonly used spiritual Sanskrit terms, and will help students of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and other Indian scriptures and philosophical works to expand their vocabularies to include the Sanskrit terms contained in them, and gain a fuller understanding in their studies.

What Readers say:

“If you are reading the writings of Swami Sivananda you will find a basketful of untranslated Sanskrit words which often have no explanation, as he assumes his readers have a background in Hindu philosophy. For writings like his, this book is invaluable, as it lists frequently used Sanskrit terms used in writings on yoga and Hindu philosophical thought.

“As the title says, this is a spiritual students’ guidebook, listing not only commonly used spiritual terms, but also giving brief information about spiritual teachers and writers, both modern and ancient.

“Abbot George’s collection is just long enough to give the meanings of useful terms without overwhelming the reader with an overabundance of extraneous words. This is a book that the spiritual student will use frequently.”—Simeon Davis
The Gospel of Thomas for Awakening
A Commentary on Jesus’ Sayings as Recorded by the Apostle Thomas

“From the very beginning there were two Christianities.” So begins this remarkable work. While the rest of the Apostles dispersed to various areas of the Mediterranean world, the apostle Thomas travelled to India, where growing evidence shows that Jesus spent his “Lost Years,” and which had been the source of the wisdom which he had brought to the “West.”

In The Gospel of Thomas for Awakening, Abbot George shines the “Light of the East” on the sometimes enigmatic sayings of Jesus recorded by his apostle Saint Thomas, revealing their unique and rich practical nature for modern day seekers for spiritual life.

Ideal for daily study or group discussion.

What Readers say:

“An extraordinary work of theological commentary, The Gospel of Thomas for Awakening is as informed and informative as it is inspired and inspiring”.—James A. Cox, Editor-in-Chief, Midwest Book Review
The Bhagavad Gita–The Song of God

A new translation of the most important spiritual classic which India has produced.

Often called the “Bible” of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita is found in households throughout India and has been translated into every major language of the world. Literally billions of copies have been handwritten and printed.

The clarity of this translation by Abbot George Burke makes for easy reading, while the rich content makes this the ideal “study” Gita. As the original Sanskrit language is so rich, often there are several accurate translations for the same word, which are noted in the text, giving the spiritual student the needed understanding of the fullness of the Gita.

For those unable to make a spiritual journey to India, a greater pilgrimage can be made by anyone anywhere in the world by simply reading The Holy Song of God, the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. It will be a holy pilgrimage of mind and spirit.
Robe of Light
An Esoteric Christian Cosmology

In Robe of Light Abbot George Burke explores the whys and wherefores of the mystery of creation. From the emanation of the worlds from the very Being of God, to the evolution of the souls to their ultimate destiny as perfected Sons of God, the ideal progression of creation is described. Since the rebellion of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise flawed the normal plan of evolution, a restoration was necessary. How this came about is the prime subject of this insightful study.

Moreover, what this means to aspirants for spiritual perfection is expounded, with a compelling knowledge of the scriptures and of the mystical traditions of East and West.

What Readers say:

“Having previously read several offerings from the pen of Abbot George Burke I was anticipating this work to be well written and an enjoyable read. However, Robe of Light actually exceeded my expectations. Abbot Burke explicates the subject perfectly, making a difficult and complex subject like Christian cosmology accessible to those of us who are not great theologians.”—Russ Thomas
Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet

The health benefits of a vegetarian diet are well known, as are the ethical aspects. But the spiritual advantages should be studied by anyone involved in meditation, yoga, or any type of spiritual practice.

Although diet is commonly considered a matter of physical health alone, since the Hermetic principle “as above, so below” is a fundamental truth of the cosmos, diet is a crucial aspect of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development as well. For diet and consciousness are interrelated, and purity of diet is an effective aid to purity and clarity of consciousness.

The major thing to keep in mind when considering the subject of vegetarianism is its relevancy in relation to our explorations of consciousness. We need only ask: Does it facilitate my spiritual growth—the development and expansion of my consciousness? The answer is Yes.

A second essay, Christian Vegetarianism, continues with a consideration of the esoteric side of diet, the vegetarian roots of early Christianity, and an insightful exploration of vegetarianism in the Old and New Testaments.

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Yama and Niyama are often called the Ten Commandments of Yoga, but they have nothing to do with the ideas of sin and virtue or good and evil as dictated by some cosmic potentate. Rather they are determined on a thoroughly practical, pragmatic basis: that which strengthens and facilitates our yoga practice should be observed and that which weakens or hinders it should be avoided.

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