



THE WORD THAT IS GOD

SCRIPTURES AND
MASTERS ON OM

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PREFACE

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

In searching for material on Om, the Pranava, I came across a kind of digest of the Upanishads in which the author had made the following paraphrase of the teachings of the Mandukya Upanishad:

“The Syllable Om is the Atman. One who knows this has his jivatman merged in the Paramatman—yea, one who knows this. Know the Omkara; for he who knows Om need know nothing further. Meditating, be absorbed in Om. It is Brahman, the fearless. For him who is ever absorbed in Om there is no fear any more. Om is the lower and the higher Brahman. It is the beginning of everything, its middle and its end, too. He who thus knows Om is merged in it forthwith by means of it. Know Om as Brahman, who is enthroned in the heart of all. The sage who knows Om as all-pervading grieves not. Partless and with unending parts is the blessed cessation of duality. Who knows Om as such, he alone is a muni, none else.”

As the Atharvashikha Upanishad 3:4b says: “He who knows Om in this manner will attain the fruits resulting from all kinds of meditation, from resorting to yoga and jnana.”

As I compiled the material on Om from the scriptures and the Masters of Wisdom I was astounded at the amount I discovered, and even more astounded at how little of it is known to any but the

most scholarly. The panorama of these texts provided me with a vista regarding Om that awed and inspired me. I easily believed the words of Gaudapada, the guru of the guru of the great Shankaracharya, who wrote in his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad: “Om is indeed the beginning, middle, and end—everything. 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.” And Shankara, commenting on these words, affirmed: “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.”

Consequently I wrote *Om Yoga* to share with others what I had learned from both my own experience in meditation and my researches in the age-old lore of Om. However, it seemed to me that serious students of yoga would benefit from having access to the entire range of material on which it was based. And so this book was put into shape for your study along with some brief comments of my own. I hope you will find it as fascinating and valuable as I do, concluding with Shankaracharya that: “Through Om the Lord is met face to face.”

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SECTION ONE: THE SCRIPTURES ON OM

The Vedas

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).

Om must be *known*. That is, through japa and meditation Om must be experienced in its true nature as the Supreme Reality itself.

The word Veda has a larger meaning than the four compilations (samhitas) of Vedic hymns. Veda is divine knowledge—knowledge that is attained through the japa and meditation of Om.

The “gods” are fourfold. First, the highly evolved astral and causal beings who possess great powers. They are enthroned upon Om because they attained their mighty status through the powers inherent in Om; their powers are simply the multiform rays of the divine Sun that is the sacred Syllable Om.

Second, the “gods” are the higher faculties possessed by each one of us—faculties that lie dormant until awakened and developed by the japa and meditation of Om.

Third, the “gods” are the powers of God that are sometimes

symbolized as god-forms. Since we are image-reflections of God, the same spiritual powers or gods are within us, though to a finite degree. Both types of inner “gods” need to be known and manifested by us in the state of Self-realization. And they are to be accessed or known through the japa and meditation of Om.

Fourth, the liberated beings who dwell in the supreme consciousness are also “gods.” Being perfected image-likenesses of God they, too, can be communicated with through Om, as it is also their essential nature and name, just as it is the essential Nature and Name of God the Absolute. Therefore Om is the means of communication with God, the Powers of God, and the gods of (in) God.

“Only its knowers sit here in peace and concord,” having attained the Highest and entered the Eternal.

The Yajur Veda

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

Krishna states in the Bhagavad Gita (8:6) that whatever we think of most during life we will think of at the time of our death, and that will determine our subsequent state. Through constant thought of and absorption in Om during his lifetime, the yogi guarantees that at the moment of death his awareness will be fixed on Om.

Om is the Lord, the Protector. It is, then, the perfect defense internally and externally. Safety consists in the constant invocation of Om.

The Upanishads

The Upanishads are the Knowledge portion (Jnana Khanda) of the Vedas, texts dealing with the Ultimate Truth and its realization. Although the amount of upanishadic material given here is considerable, there is actually a great deal more in the sense of lengthy expositions of its components: a, u, m, nada, and bindu. But it is either so obscure or in reference to things or terms that themselves would require a great deal

of explanation—since they would be known only to someone very well versed in Vedic religion—that it has seemed reasonable to omit those segments or else condense them into brief statements of the relevant ideas.

I will be commenting on some of the upanishadic passages, but will keep it to a minimum, for a careful and thoughtful reading is usually sufficient to reveal their meaning.

Akshi Upanishad

All that is, is nothing but Om (Akshi Upanishad 42[b]).

In this due order the concrete and the subtle should all be dissolved in the spiritual Self, perceiving “I am Om–Vasudeva” (Akshi Upanishad 45, 46).

“Vasudeva” means “he who dwells in all things”, and is the Spiritual Self of each one of us.

Amritabindu Upanishad

The wise mounts the chariot of Om, his charioteer is Vishnu, he seeks the abode of the Brahma-world to win Rudra for himself (Amritabindu Upanishad 2).

Om is the vehicle which carries us to God-experience.

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 3, 4).

Om recited aloud has incalculable value and effect, yet that recitation is being “on the road.” The time comes when we leave the verbal Om and in japa and meditation travel inward with the “silent” mentally intoned Om until the silence of Spirit is entered into.

One should combine the yoga [meditation] with the svara [subtle inner sound] of the mystical Syllable [Om]; should experience the yoga relating to the transcendent nirguna Brahman beyond the [objectively spoken] Syllable, by the experience of yoga without the Syllable [Asvara]; Asvara which is a form of existence should not be reckoned as non-existence. That alone is Brahman which is divisionless, non-differentiated and untinged (Amritabindu Upanishad, 7, 8).

The subject of the inner, mental Om as distinguished from the spoken Om is continued here. We must pass from the outer to the inner to the “silent” Om.

The Shabdakshara [sound-syllable: Om] is to be construed as the transcendental Brahman. When that Om has decayed, there underlies it the Akshara [the Undecaying]; if the knower of the Atman should desire the peace of the Atman he should meditate on that Akshara. [This is a play on words, for akshara means both imperishable and syllable.] The two vidyas that ought to be known are the Shabda-Brahman and that Brahman which transcends it. He who is well-versed in the Shabda-Brahman attains the transcendent Brahman (Amritabindu Upanishad, 16, 17).

By “decay” is meant attenuation or diminution (diminishment) much as the organ stops that use the term “decay” to indicate fading, lessening, or dissolving of the sound. When the grosser forms of Om have faded away in meditation, then the underlying subtle forms are experienced and peace is found.

Om! This Syllable is Brahman. With Om alone he should breathe. With frequent application of this divine sound he washes away the stains of the soul (Amritabindu Upanishad 20).

The repetition of Om should accompany our every breath. For Om is not a mere reminder of God. It is the living Presence of God, the “divine Sound” which purifies the soul from all the impurities and defects we call “sins.” Om is the divine Ganges in which we immerse ourselves and wash away all that is not God.

Then he should meditate [on Om] and utter it repeatedly, more than repeatedly; for no excess here is too much (Amritabindu Upanishad 21).

One of the deadliest flaws the spiritual aspirant can have is the attitude that spiritual life and practice can be overdone—that to be totally intent on and absorbed in spiritual practice (sadhana) at all times is unbalanced or fanatical. But it is not so.

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).

Om is the sure guide to the Goal. It leads us along the path of the breath (prana) which is also the path of unfolding consciousness and life. By holding to Om we ensure that we progress along the right way. We also see indicated in this verse that the meditation of Om is also the highest pranayama.

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).

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.

Amritanada Upanishad

Mounting on the chariot of Om, one seeking a place in the Brahmaloaka 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).

We start with the mental intonations of Om that are like intonations done aloud, but in time they become subtler, more like a soft intoning and even a gentle whispering. Finally the intonations of Om can become silent “mouthings”—movements of will and consciousness. Om takes us all the way from outer to inner, from subject to object, from vibration to silence—silence that is the very essence of Om.

Om is Brahman in one Syllable. 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).

Om is the Imperishable, which does not decay under any circumstance (Amritanada Upanishad 24).

If we would become immortal and unchanging, we may do so through immersing ourself in the immortal and unchanging Om. The very title of this upanishad means “The Immortal Sound.”

Annapurna Upanishad

Om encompasses the Root of phenomena [Brahman] (Annapurna Upanishad I-3-4).

Atharvashikha Upanishad

I meditate on that Ultimate Truth, the sound of Om, which shines as the Turiya of Turiya (the consciousness of Consciousness), which is one and only one.

Before the actual text of the upanishad begins, there are these introductory words.

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. Meditation on Om should be resorted to by seekers after liberation. This Syllable is the Parabrahman, which it designates. Omkara is the higher as well as the lower Brahman, as the Sruti says. [This statement is found in both the Maitri and Prashna Upanishads as well as here.] The four Vedas are the four feet of Om. This Syllable is the Supreme Brahman (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:1, 2).

Om is “the First Word,” of which Saint John the Beloved wrote: “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.”

Here it is plainly stated that japa and meditation of Om comprise the original yoga practiced by the Vedic Rishis at the beginning of the human race. Moreover, this yoga was not worked out by them, but was manifested to their inner awareness even before the Vedas were revealed to them. Om Yoga is the real Path of the Masters that “should be resorted to by seekers after liberation.”

Om is the self-effluent Brahman which shines alone and sees everything (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1.6).

Om, Om, Om—having thus pronounced the Pranava in three

gradations, the fourth is the tranquillized Atman. Thus, by having recourse to the application of the prolonged intonation of the Pranava in the attitude [bhava], All is Om, the radiance of the Atman perpetually manifests itself devoid of the veil that enshrouded it (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:9).

This passage does not mean that we should only say Om three times, but that there are three gradations or inner levels of Om—the physical, astral, and causal—which we should pass through in meditation. These three gradations lead to the turiya—pure consciousness—form of Om that is both jivatman and Paramatman.

The translation of P. R. Ramachander, has this sentence at the end of the ninth verse: “It [Om] takes one via the sushumna nadi to the lotus with a thousand petals” (Sahasrara). (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:9).

This is extremely important, as it tells us that the consciousness of the yogi which is dispersed throughout the body—and especially throughout the various centers of power or chakras—is taken up along the Sushumna Nadi to the Sahasrara. Thus we see that Om japa and meditation open the sushumna nadi and lift up the consciousness.

That which causes all the pranas to prostrate themselves before and get merged in the Paramatman, 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).

The first sentence is a play on words. To do prostration is to do pranam. Therefore that which causes the *pranas* to bow before the Lord in *pranam* is the *Pranava*, which may also be translated as the pranam-causer. It is Om which unites all the levels of our being with one another and then unites them to God.

That which elevates the pronouncer, even on its being pronounced once in the pluta-svara [with the prolonged

intonation], is the Pranava, Om. That which causes all the pranas to melt away absolutely is the Pralaya [known as the Pranava], it being the cause of the absolute abatement into the chief prana of the other subsidiary pranas (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10b).

The subtle sound of Om intoned inwardly immediately begins elevating the consciousness. Om is itself the pralaya (dissolution), the resolution of the life force and consciousness back into their origin: Spirit.

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 [Taraka] (Atharvashikha Upanishad 2:1).

For the sake of simplicity I have used Om here and in some of the subsequent parts of this upanishadic text where the term used is actually “Turiyomkar,” that designates the pure consciousness (turiya) aspect of Om (Omkar) which is the highest, beyond all conditioning and the three usual states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

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].”

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).

It is said in other upanishads that the gods took refuge in Om and were saved from destruction. Thus Om is Vishnu, a name of God that means “the Preserver.” We, too, by taking refuge in the invocation of Om will be made safe—but not in a static sense of mere preservation. The power of Om will increase the boundaries of our consciousness to its innate infinity, demonstrating its nature as Brahma by drawing us into its superabundant Being. (Brahma comes from the root “brih” which means to expand.).

Since it remains beyond the reach of all powers of perception yet is itself that which reveals all that is perceived—even as a light placed in the darkness will disclose all things apart from itself—it is the self-manifest luminary that reveals all things apart from itself in their real character.

Since it reveals itself by shining distinctly from within the things of the phenomenal world—which it thereby reveals—it is ever saying: ‘I, the absolute existence, the Om, am here within,’ just as a flash of lightning reveals itself from within the cloud, which it also reveals by bursting through it—though the cloud itself has been concealing it—and pervades all the worlds as well as the infinite numbers of macrocosms that are within its range in the character of absolute existence [Sat], consciousness [Chit], and bliss [Ananda], and causes them to pervade in universal forms. Because of such a pervading, Om becomes [seen as] the all-pervading Mahadeva [Shiva]. This is the final conclusion arrived at by the gods and the Vedas (Atharvashikha Upanishad 2:4, 5).

This whole passage is very complex and I have unhesitatingly simplified it. The fundamental idea here is that Om reveals itself from within that which conceals it from those who do not meditate upon it. That is, through japa and meditation Om turns what conceals it into what reveals it.

Om embraces the state of waking in which the gross elements of existence are perceived, the state of dreaming in which the subtle elements of existence are perceived, the state of [dreamless] sleep in which the gross and subtle elements of existence are dormant, gathered up into their potential state, and the state of pure consciousness which reveals 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).

Om is consciousness itself, within which are contained the four modes of waking, dreaming, dreamlessness, and superconsciousness. That is, Om is manifesting as all these three modes of consciousness, and further transcends them as turiya. Consequently japa and meditation of Om unites the three lower states and enables us to both master and transcend them. For all are inherent in, and inseparable from, Om. The upanishad is also describing the procedure of meditation when it speaks of Om causing the various states of consciousness to “dissolve into each other—the grosser merging into the next succeeding subtler ones” until “achieving the attainment of the state of Turiya-Turiya” which is perfect Unity.

Should any man stabilize this changeless Atman in the ether of the middle of his heart, be it for a little more or less than the duration of a second, through meditation, and become entirely absorbed in him, the highest fruit thereof will be the attainment, by the meditator, of the state of the Paramatman (Atharvashikha Upanishad 3:4a).

Darkness may prevail for untold millions of years within caves in the depths of the earth. Yet how long will it take for the darkness to be vanquished at the entry of light? No time at all. Instantly illumination will take place. Consequently the upanishad states that if the yogi can stabilize his consciousness within the pure consciousness at the core of his being (not the physical heart) for even a moment and pass therefrom to the total union of his limited consciousness with the Limitless Brahman, the Supreme Self (Paramatman), his attainment will be

boundless. Sages speak of a Supreme Moment in which enlightenment comes to the yogi.

The entire path of Om will be realized by him. He who knows Om in this manner will attain the fruits resulting from all kinds of meditation, from resorting to Yoga and Jnana. 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” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 3:4 b, c).

In this instance “Isha” and “Shiva” refer to the Supreme God. Brahman is said to be “without a support” because God is the Support of all, himself needing no support. In a sense this is the Vedic equivalent of the “Uncaused Cause” concept.

Atharvashira Upanishad

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! 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).

This is a condensation of a passage that speaks of Om “swallowing” all things, followed by a very lengthy list of those things. The idea implied is that all things come from Om and thus are eventually absorbed back into Om, which then alone remains as the Sole Reality, Brahman.

This upanishad further informs us that Om possesses the quality of absorbing all things into itself. So the constant invoker and meditator on Om will be united to and assumed into the Supreme Brahman that manifests as Om. Indeed, we should salute it again and again!

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 elevates, as it were, the entire body, for that reason alone it is known as the Omkara (Atharvashira Upanishad 45).

Here, too, we are told that the Pranava is not a mere spiritual abstraction, but a powerful entity that has the effect of transforming the physical body. The invocation of Om causes the physical, astral and causal levels of the body to vibrate at increasingly higher rates of consciousness and function. So the invocation of Om elevates us on every level of our existence. Purification of matter itself is possible through the invocation of Om. We can heal and correct our body and the world around us through the sovereignty of Om. And this is true of the astral and causal levels, as well.

We have already seen that Om absorbs all things. Here we discover that it also impels all things—especially its invoker—toward itself. Once again we find that the divine power of Om perfects us in yoga

Now 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.

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.

Now arises the question, Why is it known as the Endless One? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, neither the beginning nor the end thereof is reached, either in the transverse direction or upwards or downwards, for that reason it is known as the Endless One.

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.

Now arises the question, Why is it known as the Subtle One? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it abides in [all] other bodies, only after becoming the subtle, innermost Atman, subtler than the tiniest end-point (tip) of a grain of rice, for that reason it is known as the Subtle One.

Now arises the question, Why is it known as the Pure One? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it manifests itself in its own pure form and reveals other forms apart from itself, for that reason it is known as the Pure One.

Now arises the question, Why is it known as the Shining One? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it causes all bodies to be revealed in their real nature as non-existent apart from itself, in the very thick darkness [of ignorance], for that reason it is known as the Shining [Revealing] One.

Now arises the question, Why is it known as the Parabrahman? The answer is: For the reason that even while it is being pronounced, it increases in volume by drawing everything apart from itself and causing all to be merged in its expansive abundance, itself transcending them all (Atharvashira Upanishad 46-53).

Again, Brahman comes from the root “brih” which means to expand.

Whatever has been expounded in this upanishad is Om alone: the Brahman indicated by the term Tat [That], that is the Absolute True Existence (Atharvashira Upanishad 70).

There is another, much shorter, recension of the Atharvashira Upanishad that has been translated by P. R. Ramachander. It contains the following:

Om is the Pranava. That Pranava is spread everywhere. That which is everywhere is the greatest. That which is limitless, shines

like a white star. That which is also called Shuklam (White–Radiance) is very very subtle. That which is subtle is like a lightning power. That which is like lightning power is the ultimate Brahman. That Brahman is one and only one,...the ultimate God and the Lord of all things (Atharvashira Upanishad 3-6).

Here we see the important point that the more subtle the form of Om, the more powerful it is—and is ultimately seen to be Brahman itself, the Supreme Ishwara.

The fourth section of the upanishad outlines the ways in which Shiva (Rudra) is considered “the personification of the Pranava” and lists its qualities:

It sends the souls towards heaven, at the time of death.

It is all-pervading like oil in sesame—pervading the entire world and its beings.

It is Ananta—without beginning or end.

It is called Tara—Deliverer or Savior—and delivers from all the fears of life.

By pronouncing it we are rid of all pains.

It is the subtle pervader, yet without touching anything (remaining separate).

As soon as it is pronounced, in the state of darkness where nothing is visible, holy knowledge comes like a ray of lightning.

It is Parabrahman, inside and outside of everything, the refuge of everything, and bigger than the big, because it is inside every thing.

It is called Eka—the One—because it singly destroys everything and recreates everything.

It is the sacred water (tirtha) because it is the ultimate mingling of all sacred waters which are sought after, in the east, south, north and west.

It is also Eka because it creates all beings and travels within them alone without any one realizing where it comes from and where it goes.

It is not understood by all, but only by great sages and devotees.

It is Ishana because of its power for creation and preservation, and also because it rules over all devas (gods).

As human beings approach a cow for milk, the wise have recourse to it.

It is Ishana because the Veda points it out as that which reveals the heaven and who rules over the gods.

It is Maheswara—the Great Lord—because it blesses its invokers by giving them knowledge, because it created the various worlds and brought out knowledge, and because through it yogis rise above all things and reach the highest state of existence.

Bahvricha Upanishad

The Bahvricha Upanishad teaches about the Feminine Aspect of God—the Goddess or Mahashakti. The third verse says of Her:

This is the secret Om grounded in the word Om.

That is, the highest form of the Goddess is the most subtle form of Om that is perceived only in meditation when the objectified “word Om” is reduced to its ultimate refinement. For the Goddess is really Consciousness manifesting as Energy and Sound.

Bhasma Jabala Upanishad

The Bhasma Jabala Upanishad describes Shiva as being: **Of the form of Om**; and states that the perfected yogi will himself realize: “**I am Om.**”

Brahma Upanishad

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).

In Vedic religion the fire rite, the Agnihotra or Havan, is the supreme ritual act. The sacred fire is kindled by the friction of two wooden sticks called aranis. This is an important symbol, for it is considered that the fire is latent in the wood until the friction causes it to manifest. In

the same way, enlightenment is latent in the yogi, awaiting the right conditions to be provided for its manifestation.

We are the lower arani, and Om is the upper arani. When they are brought together and made to interact with one another through the japa and meditation of Om, God is revealed to the meditator both within and without. The Hidden becomes manifest, and the Unseen becomes seen through Om Yoga.

Brahmabindu Upanishad

Beginning the Yoga with Om, meditate wordlessly on the highest one, since through wordless meditation Brahman is being attained (Brahmabindu Upanishad 7).

Although we may sometimes intone Om aloud, that is only the first step; we must take it inside in silent japa and meditation to attain its Essence.

Brahman is the Syllable Om; when it fades off, what remains the wise, the seekers of peace of soul, meditate upon—that eternal One (Brahmabindu Upanishad 16).

The experience of Om in subtler and subtler forms during meditation is the path to “that Eternal One.”

Two knowledges are necessary, the Sound-Brahman [Shabda Brahman] and the uppermost [Parabrahman]; one who is versed in the Sound-Brahman attains to the highest Brahman too (Brahmabindu Upanishad 17).

God, the sole Reality, must be *known* by us. Mere pious busyness and theologizing—knowing *about* God rather than really knowing God—do not avail anything ultimately. Gnosis (jnana) is imperative. For it alone is efficacious in the removal of ignorance and bondage.

Om is the Shabda Brahman, “the word that is God” as the Bhagavad Gita says. Those who know Om as such through their experience gained by its japa and meditation are the ones who shall attain to the unitive knowledge of Parabrahman.

Brahmavidya Upanishad

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).

In the Vedas God is many times spoken of as Fire (Agni). So also in the Upanishads. “Burnt clean in the blaze of my being, in me many find home” (Bhagavad Gita 4:10). The fiery nature of divinity has many aspects. God is fire in the sense of the universal “heat” that produces the evolving creation and into which it is ultimately dissolved. God is also the spiritual fire which burns us clean, purifying and refining us as the smelter purifies and refines gold. In the fire that is God, the true nature of all things is revealed and all which is untrue is dissolved so that only the truth of our divinity will remain.

Elsewhere this upanishad employs the interesting expression *Omkara Atman*: Om that is the Self.

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).

These verses are speaking of the meditation of Om. Those who follow the thread of the subtle Pranava to the end will merge in the transcendental Consciousness, beyond which is nothing, but within which is everything.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad there is a symbolic story of the gods (devas) and the demons (asuras) struggling with one another for supremacy. This symbolizes the interior struggle of the positive traits of each one of us with our negative traits. Incidentally, it mentions that there were more demons than gods—as is the case with us when we awaken and realize the need for ascent to a higher life and level of consciousness.

Being wise, the gods realized that they could gain the ascendancy over the demons by the chanting of Om. To do this, they permeated all the senses and powers of the individual with the vibrations of Om, thus purifying the person and banishing the demons. The parable also indicates that through the intoning of Om the gods dispelled all the negative past karmas incurred through the senses and powers of the yogi.

However, the final step was when they had Om be joined to the breath. Although the demons had been able to at least counter-attack before, when:

they charged it [the breath] and wanted to strike it with evil, as a clod of earth, striking against a rock, is shattered, so were they shattered, flung in all directions, and perished. Therefore the gods became victorious, and the demons were crushed. He who knows thus becomes his true Self” (1.3.7).

The next verse says that when the gods inquired as to how the breath joined with Om **has thus restored us** to their kingdom, they were told that the breath conquered on their behalf: **for it is the essence of the powers of the body.**

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).

Through Om we come to know Brahman.

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).

There is no higher meditation than the meditation of Om, for it is the essence of Divinity.

Speech [Vak] and Life-force [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. By this [Om] does the threefold knowledge proceed. 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 1.1.5-10).

Speech and prana are manifested and reunited in the repetition of Om, because Om is the point of their origin and their return. There is a very practical side to this, for: "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." Om being the source of all and the manifester of all is obviously the accomplisher of all. Since prana also means breath, all the foregoing applies to the joining of Om to the breath in the practice of Om Yoga.

The Brihadaranyaka parable about the gods and demons struggling

with each other is given in Chandogya Upanishad 1.2.1-7, concluding with the statement (1.2.8) that those who know the union of Om with the breath are invincible. Then it lists great Masters who had this knowledge, saying that the sages consider Om as the very being of those Masters (1.2.10-14)—and it will be the same with those who meditate in the same way.

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

We are frequently going to encounter the word *udgitha*—the sung or intoned form of Om—in the upanishadic verses regarding Om. Om is essential for all Vedic recitations and rites, being intoned throughout. It is technically referred to as “the udgitha” in the ceremonial texts, and the upanishads also use that term to underscore its prime value and dignity as the essence of the Vedas. Those who desire to know the Self as they engage in the japa and meditation of Om shall indeed obtain that knowing.

Verses 1.3.1-7 give another symbolic story of the gods and asuras in which it is said that the yogi should realize that the sun is Om, and that the sun vibrates Om and imparts it to all sentient beings. Also that the breath is the power of the sun, and both the breath and sun are Om. Then it explains that all the pranas are Om—as is the entire cosmos.

One should meditate on the udgitha as this Syllable [Om].... Verily, the gods, when they were afraid of death, took refuge in the threefold knowledge [of the Rig, Saman, and Yajur Vedas].... Death saw them there in the Rig, in the Saman and in the Yajus just as one might see a fish in water. When they found this out, they rose out of the Rig, out of the Saman, out of the Yajus and took refuge in sound. Verily, then one learns the Rik, one sounds out Om. [It is] the same with Saman; [it is] the same with Yajus. 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).

The Rig Veda has told us that the gods repose on/in the bindu of Om, the center of all being, the “heart” of God. Now we are being given an account of how they ascended to immortality. While examining this, we should keep in mind that the “gods” not only exist in the subtle cosmos, but they exist also in us. Therefore a parable about the external gods reveals the inner spiritual faculties that correspond to them.

The gods felt they would be safe from death by merging their consciousness with the Vedic mantras. This, of course, was foolish, since all that begins must end. Only the eternal abides unchanging and forever. Just as creation is cyclic, so also is the sounding forth of the Vedas. When creation is withdrawn, so are they. And since death is inherent in the “life” of relative existence, death could see and seize them. Realizing this, they arose from the Vedic mantric vibrations and entered into the Primal Sound: Om which underlies the Vedas and which is imperishable (akshara). The sage points out that no one learns the Vedas without first intoning Om. This is what pointed the gods to the Immortal Secret through which they became themselves immortal and beyond all fear. Wherefore the true jnani (knower) values Om and takes refuge in it through japa and meditation. When he has fully merged his consciousness in Om, then he, too, becomes immortal and fearless.

Now, verily, what is the udgitha is the Om. What is Om is the udgitha. And so verily, the udgitha is the yonder sun and the Om, for the sun is continually sounding Om (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1).

The significant part of this verse is the statement that “the sun is continually sounding ‘Om,’” indicating that 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.”

Our life depends on the light of the sun, thus our life 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.

One should meditate on the breath in the mouth as the udgitha, for it is continually sounding Om (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.3).

On the subtle levels of our being the prana is always producing the sound of Om, and that includes the breath, the prana's most objective manifestation. We can even say that the soul lives and breathes in Om. This is why in both japa and meditation we intone Om in time with the breath. In this way we move from body-mind consciousness into spirit-consciousness through Om.

Now, verily, what is the udgitha is the Pranava. What is Pranava is the udgitha. [If one knows this], verily, from the seat of the Hotri priest, all wrong singing is corrected, yea is corrected (Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.5).

The Hotri priest is the one who directs the actions of the sacred rites. Symbolically speaking, “the seat of the Hotri priest” is our inner consciousness, and just as mistakes in recitation of the Vedic mantras are corrected from the seat of the Hotri priest, so through the japa and meditation of Om “conducted” by our inmost Self all the “wrong singing” of our life-actions will be corrected. That is, both ignorance and negative karmas will be removed and dissolved.

The Udgitha [Om] controls the worlds which are above the sun, as also the desires of the gods (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).

Those who attain liberation from earthly rebirth pass through the sun for evolution in higher worlds. And in those higher worlds Om is

still the Master Controller—both of those worlds and of the evolution of those who live in them. So for those who aspire to higher evolution, Om is the eternal key.

In Chandogya Upanishad 1.8.1-8, it is said that three great knowers of Om—Silaka, Caikitayana, and Pravahana had a discussion about Om. In conclusion, Silaka asked:

What is the essence of this world? Akasha [Ether] replied Pravahana; All these beings arise from akasha alone and are finally dissolved into akasha; because akasha alone is greater than all these and akasha is the support at all times (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.1).

And since sound—Om, specifically—arises from akasha, he continued:

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 (Chandogya Upanishad 1.9.2).

In meditation we experience the subtle sounds and bhavas of Om in increasingly higher—and therefore better—levels. Om Yoga is literally the Highway of the Infinite—the Infinite itself which we experience in higher and better forms.

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).**

This is the udgitha [Om], highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, mediates on udgitha, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this udgitha to Udara Shandilya, he also said: As long as they shall know this udgitha 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).

It is our nature to want only the best, so the upanishad is telling us what the best really is: Om. “Highest and best” is an epithet for God, so we are also being told that Om is Divine, and through it we can ascend to become ourselves the highest and best, participants in the Supreme Glory that is God. Om is endless; this means that it is infinite, without either beginning or end. Om is eternity itself. By means of Om we can rise to the highest states of being (“worlds”), including that of God himself.

The instructions of Atidhanvan Shunaka assure us that even in this world we can ascend to the highest consciousness, that as long as Om is held onto even our earthly life shall be divinized.

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).

Brahma the Creator, also called Prajapati, manifested the three lower worlds (Bhur, Bhuvah, and Swah). Regarding this, the upanishad says:

Prajapati brooded on the worlds. From them, thus brooded upon, issued forth the threefold Veda (as their essence). He brooded on this. From this, thus brooded upon, issued forth the syllables Bhuh, Bhuvah and Svah. He brooded on them. From them, thus brooded upon, issued forth (as their essence) the Syllable Om. Just as all the parts of the leaf are permeated by the ribs of the leaf, so are all the words permeated by the Syllable Om. Verily, the Syllable Om is all this—yea, the Syllable Om is verily all this (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.2, 3).

Certainly it seems incredible that the little Syllable Om could be

everything, and the seed of everything. But consider how the tiny acorn is the seed of the gigantic oak, containing within itself the genetic patterns and potentials of all the oaks that shall eventually descend from that oak—from that acorn.

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. The solar rays do not just strike the surface of our body, but actually penetrate into the physical nerves (nadis). The nadis are also channels in the astral body that correspond to the physical nerves. Just as the electrical impulses flow through the physical nerves, the subtle life force, or prana, flows through the subtle nadis and keeps us alive and functioning. And as we have already seen, the prana, as it flows, is always sounding Om. The prana, 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—especially 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 and nevermore be compelled to return to earthly rebirth.

Under the quotation from the Yajur Veda we have already seen that whatever we think of most during life we will think of at the time of our death. This was affirmed by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (8:5-10): “At the hour of death, when a man leaves his body, he must depart with his consciousness absorbed in me. Then he will be united with me. Be certain of that. Whatever a man remembers at the last, when he is leaving the body, will be realized by him in the hereafter; because that will be what his mind has most constantly dwelt on, during this life. Therefore you must remember me at all times, and do your duty. If your mind and heart are set upon me constantly, you will come to me. Never doubt this. Make a habit of practicing meditation, and do not let your mind be distracted. In this way you will come finally to the Lord, who is the light-giver, the highest of the high.”

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.

Darshan Upanishad

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).

Pranayama is control of the subtle life forces—prana. Some yogis accomplish this control by means of various breathing exercises. But we have already seen in the verses from the Atharvashikha Upanishad that the invocation and meditation on Om causes the yogi's various bodies and his consciousness itself to rise to higher levels of vibration. In this way, then, japa and meditation of Om is the higher pranayama, physical breath control being but the barest shadow of it since it affects only the lower bodies. Breath being a manifestation of prana it is only natural that our intonations of Om should be joined to the breath..

Dhyanabindu Upanishad

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).

Although “Brahmin” has come to designate a member of the highest Hindu caste consisting of priests, pandits, philosophers, and religious leaders, it literally means “knower of Brahman,” which is the sense intended here.

The Pranava, Om, is the supreme Bija [Mantra], with the Bindu and the Nada. What is above that stands enduring forever. What is endowed with sound is the Pranava, typical of all sound-phenomena; when the chief ingredient [the differentiating substratum] is lost, the soundless residuum is the highest seat [Brahman]. That sound arising from the heart, Om of the Pranava, is eternal [as borne testimony to by the Scriptural text, Eternal indeed is the Omkara]; the yogi who discovers that transcendent One which transcends that sound, stands clear of all doubt (DhyanaBindu Upanishad, 2, 3).

Bija Mantra: A single-syllable “seed” mantra from which realization grows as a tree from a seed.

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.

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.

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).

This is a frequently used simile for japa and meditation of Om in the upanishads. We see that Om is the impelling force that unites the soul with God “if aim be taken with due care,” if the practice is complete and correct.

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).

In other upanishads, such as the Jabala Upanishad, Om is referred to as the *moksha-mantra*—the mantra that bestows perfect liberation to the soul.

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 three worlds” refers to the three levels of creation: physical, astral, and causal. Om is the inmost reality of them all as well as the inner faculties of our innate divine knowledge we call “gods.”

The fine [subtle] end of the Pranava cannot be expressed, as of an unbroken stream of oil or the long [continuous] tolling of a bell. He who knows him is the real knower of the Veda and becomes a jivanmukta (DhyanaBindu Upanishad 18, 37).

There is no really good expression in English for the words translated “tolling of a bell.” It means the continuing resonating of sound after the bell has been struck that gradually fades away into subtler and subtler sound and then into silence.

It is extremely interesting to see that the Pranava is here referred to as “him” rather than “it.”

A jivanmukta is one who is liberated here and now in this present life.

One should contemplate upon Omkara as Ishwara (DhyanaBindu Upanishad 19).

“Ishwara” means “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.

Making the Atman the lower arani and Om the upper arani, and practicing the friction of meditation, one should apply himself to the best of his strength to the resonance of the sound of Omkara (DhyanaBindu Upanishad 22, 23).

Since meditation is the method by which we attune ourselves to “the resonance of the sound of Omkara,” that is being spoken of here.

The Supreme Self, or Paramatman, is often described in the upanishads as a Swan (Hamsa) floating unwetted [unaffected] upon the sea of creation. Therefore the upanishad also says:

Those who look upon Om as of the form of the Hamsa staying in all, shining like tens of millions of suns, being alone, staying in gamagama [the state of ever going and coming] and being devoid of motion—at last such persons are freed from sin (DhyanaBindu Upanishad 24).

Pranava [japa] causes the lotus of the heart to turn upward and open (DhyanaBindu Upanishad 34).

This is a condensation and paraphrase. “Heart” (hridaya) means the core of our being. Presently our inner consciousness is turned downward, oriented toward external and material objects—a condition that unfailingly produces ignorance and rebirth. Further, it is shrunken and minimal in its scope. Also, as I.K. Taimni points out: “No success in yoga is possible unless all the energies of the soul are polarized and harnessed for achieving the central purpose.” Invocation of Om repolarizes and reorients our inner consciousness, turning it upward toward Spirit. But it does more than turn us upward; it also begins to develop, evolve, and enlarge our consciousness, extending it to infinity.

Practicing meditation, one should apply himself to the best of his strength to the resonance of the sound of Omkara (DhyanaBindu Upanishad).

Garbha Upanishad

The Garbha Upanishad describes the growth of the embryo in the womb and the psychological states arising in the incarnating Self throughout the time of gestation. The tenth verse says:

In the eighth month, the Jiva gets the capacity to know its past affairs (of past births), and conceives of the imperishable Atman as Om, through perfect knowledge and meditation.

Thus Om Yoga is known to all in the womb, though forgotten immediately upon birth. Nevertheless, it is always present in our subconscious.

Gopala Tapaniya Upanishad

Krishna, as a manifestation of Vishnu, is depicted as holding a conch, chakra [wheel], mace, and bow. These four implements represent his divine powers. Verse forty-eight of the Gopala Tapaniya Upanishad says: **These four are identical with Om**, indicating that all divine powers are aspects of Om.

Hamsa Upanishad

The Hamsa Upanishad expounds the Supreme Self as the Divine Swan or Hamsa (Hansa). In the fourth section the “parts” or aspects of the Swan are enumerated, and it says: **Omkaara is its head**, meaning that Om is the very Consciousness of Brahman. Toward the end of the section the upanishad says that when all ignorance is dispelled, the Infinite Self shines forth: **being effulgence in its very essence, the immaculate, the eternal, the stainless and the most quiescent Om. Thus is the teaching of the Vedas; and thus is the Upanishad.**

“The most quiescent Om” is Om in its ultimate stage as subtle or soundless sound.

Hayagriva Upanishad

Salutations unto Thee [Vishnu] who art the embodiment of

Om (Hayagriva Upanishad).

As in the Atharvashikha Upanishad, Om is identified with the preserving-saving aspect of God known as Vishnu. Later in the upanishad, Vishnu is actually addressed in a prayer as “Om,” indicating that the preserving and saving power of God is an aspect or attribute of Om.

Om is the connecting link between the innermost Atman and the Paramatman, thus bringing about the identity of the two indicated by the term ‘asi.’ (Hayagriva Upanishad).

In the Chandogya Upanishad there is the account of a sage teaching his son the nature of his true Self. He employs many similes, concluding each one by saying: *Tat twam asi*—You are That. *Asi* is the word meaning “are.”

“Yoga” means “union,” and “yogi” means “one who produces union.” Although it is not incorrect to refer to individuals as yogis and their spiritual practice as yoga, in the highest sense God is the only yogi, for it is his power alone that effects the union (yoga) of the individual consciousness with himself, the Supreme Consciousness. And that power is the power of Om. Om is the link, the bridge between the finite and the Infinite. It not only joins them, it makes them one. It is the primal awareness of I AM on the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels.

Jabala Upanishad

Once students of sacred knowledge asked Yajnavalkya: Can we gain life eternal by japa? Yajnavalkya said: By the immortal Name one becomes immortal. He should utter the moksha mantra [Pranava, Om] which is the essence [substance] of the Vedas. This is Brahman. It should be meditated upon (Jabala Upanishad 3, 4).

Japa and meditation of Om are so simple, so “small,” that it is only natural for us to wonder if such things could result in the attaining of Cosmic Consciousness. So his students asked the great sage Yajnavalkya if life eternal, the knowledge of God, could be gained by means of

them. The answer was clear and unequivocal: Yes.

Kaivalya Upanishad

By making his own inner sense [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).

The inner consciousness of the yogi and Om, when “rubbed together” by japa and meditation, produce the fire of divine knowledge which reduces ignorance to ashes. It is ignorance that produces all the wrong and foolish actions engaged in by human beings, and those actions produce all the sufferings of human beings. Ignorance, then, is the root of sin and suffering, and eradication of ignorance is the only way to be rid of sin and suffering. Japa and meditation of Om completely burn up our ignorance and reduce the seeds of our karma to ashes, ending ignorance and rebirth for us and enlightening and freeing us.

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 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. Meditating on Om, one becomes worthy of worship in the world of Brahman (Katha Upanishad 1. 2.15-17).

Om is the aim of all spiritual aspirations, and Om is the means to attain them.

The terms “lower” and “higher” in this quotation refer to Brahman in his manifestations as both Relative Existence and the Transcendent Absolute Existence. The idea here is that Om embraces the total range

of existence, which is also the totality of God (Brahman), that God is Om, and can be attained through Om. The upanishad tells us that both aspects of God can be attained by Om Yogis lest they think that the transcendental aspect (Nirguna Brahman), is beyond their capacity to attain. Om attains everything, is the key to everything—material, psychic, or spiritual—indeed, *is* everything. Om itself is Cosmic Consciousness.

According to the Vedic tradition embodied in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Yoga Sutras, Om is the means to attain liberation of the spirit and divine consciousness. Those who so attain become themselves “deities,” worthy of worship and able to assist those who call upon them. This is the secret of the “gods” who, the upanishads tell us, took refuge in Om, thereby merging in That which is Om and becoming themselves Om and worthy of worship by those who would also attain the “world” (status) of Brahman. Shankara in his commentary on this upanishad says: “Meditating on Om one is worshipped in the world of Brahman.’ This idea is this: Getting identified with Brahman, he becomes worshippable like Brahman.”

Katharudra Upanishad

The Katharudra Upanishad is one of what are known as “sannyas upanishads”—those that describe the taking up of the sadhu life and how it is to be lived. Verses one and two tell how a man about to renounce should impart the final teaching to his son. Among other profound philosophical statements, he should say to his son:

You are the Syllable Om.

And repeating the statements back to his father, the son should say:

I am the Syllable Om.

Such a one is fit for the world of Brahman, concludes the second verse.

Krishna Upanishad

The Krishna Upanishad refers to Om as the “Brahma Pranava,” the

Pranava [Om] that is God. Sometimes in the scriptures, Brahma refers to the *Pitamaha*, the Great Father who creates the three lower worlds of Bhur, Bhuva, and Swah—the world of men, angels, and archangels—rather than Brahman. In that case, “Brahma Pranava” would mean that Brahma creates these worlds through the mantric agency of Om.

Kshurika Upanishad

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.

All distractions in meditation are transcended by means of the japa and meditation of Om, which centers us in our true Self or consciousness.

As the Kaivalya Upanishad states, it is the power of Om that severs the bond of ignorance tying us to the cycle of rebirth. So this upanishad also speaks of Om as a knife that releases us forever from “the ties that bind.”

Kundika Upanishad

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

This may also correctly be translated as: “The transcendent Brahman is the meaning of Om.”

Maha Upanishad

Only Om is real (Maha Upanishad 4:1.24).

Mahanarayan Upanishad

I am that Brahman expressed by Om in unity and also expressed

in his threefold aspect (Mahanarayan Upanishad 4:1).

The Supreme Being is the most excellent Pranava that is taught in the Vedas.... The threefold worlds and the entire Veda are comprised in Om (Mahanarayan Upanishad 8:1).

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. This designation of the Supreme is on the lips of contemplative sages and it is the central support of undying bliss. May we always repeat in our contemplative sacrifices the designation Om which has for its cause the self-luminous Reality and may we also hold him in our hearts with salutations. The Syllable Om declares the Supreme. God-like sages attained the self-luminous Reality that pervades the three states of consciousness [through Om that is] secretly held by the teachers who praise it by chants in the Vedic speech (Mahanarayan Upanishad 12:8-11).

“Om is hidden in the Vedas” as their inmost meaning or message, as well as their essence. Thus the knowledge of Om is the sovereign secret of the Vedas. For this reason sages never cease invoking it.

Regarding “our contemplative sacrifices,” the Bhagavad Gita says: “Among sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa” (10:25).

The Syllable Om is dissolved in the primal cause during contemplation (Mahanarayan Upanishad 12:17).

And so are those who contemplate on it.

Aditya, the supreme cause of the universe, is the giver of light and is the source of all power. He is denoted by the Syllable Om.... That form of the sun is Brahman.... The Pranava representing the cause of the universe denotes that Brahman (Mahanarayan Upanishad 15:2; 37:1).

Aditya is a title of the sun, but is used here symbolically to indicate Brahman, the Source of Life.

I am Sadasiva denoted by Pranava (Mahanarayan Upanishad 21:1).

Sadashiva means “eternally auspicious,” “eternally happy,” and “eternally prosperous.”

Mahanarayan Upanishad 29:1 gives a long list of the powers and elements of the universe, and concludes with the statement: “The source of all these is the Supreme denoted by the Syllable Om.” The same occurs—with a different list—in 35:1, 2, saying at the end: “He who is denoted by the Pranava is all these.”

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).

He who is one with Om is one with all: both the absolute, the Paramatman, and the relative, the manifold universe. For they are one.

Mahanarayan Upanishad 38:1 gives a mantra known as the Trisuparna Mantra, one of the most beautiful of the ancient prayers: “May the Supreme reach me. May the Blissful reach me. May the Supreme alone that is blissful reach me. O Lord, being one among Thy creatures I am Thy child. Suppress the dreary dream of the empirical existence that I experience. For that I offer myself as an oblation into Thee, O Lord, and the vital and mental powers Thou hast kept in me.” The next verse says that those who recite the mantra “attain union with Pranava, i.e., the Deity of this mantra.”

Om is Brahman. Om is Vayu [Prana]. Om is the finite Self. Om is the Supreme Truth. Om is all. Om is the multitude of citadels [the bodies of creatures]. Salutation to him. That Supreme Being moves inside the heart of created being possessing manifold forms. O Supreme,... Thou art Om (Mahanarayan Upanishad 68:1, 2).

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).

Since “upanishad” literally means “that which was heard while sitting near,” the words “many great upanishads” in the foregoing verse may simply mean “many great teachings.”

Maitrayana Upanishad

The Maitrayana Upanishad is a different recension of the better-known Maitri Upanishad which will follow this section. Because there are some points of difference I am including and sometimes commenting on both.

Indeed, there are two forms of Brahman, the one having form, the other formless [quoted from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.1]; but the one having form is the untruth [or: unreal], the formless one is the truth [or: real], is Brahman, as Brahman the light, as the light of the sun; but this is the Syllable Om as the Self. ‘But he made himself threefold’ [quoted from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.2.3], because in Om there are three matras [a, u, and m]; through it this whole world is all interwoven lengthwise and breadthwise in that [Brahman who is the sun]. As it is said: ‘Indeed the sun is this Om;’ therefore one should meditate and make himself ready to unite himself with it.

“And in another place also it is said: ‘The udgitha is the Pranava and the Pranava is the udgitha. That is why the udgitha is that sun and is the Pranava’ [quoted from the Chandogya Upanishad 1.5.1]. Because it is said: [One should meditate on] that udgitha, which is called the holy sound [Om], which is the guide or propeller which is in the form of light, which is sorrowless, ageless, free from death,

which is threefold, and which lies concealed in the cavity of the heart. Because it is said: Having the root above, it is the three-footed Brahman; ether, air, fire, water, and earth are its branches. That is Brahman and its splendor is that which is that sun and it is also the splendor of that Syllable Om; that is why one should worship it [Brahman, the sun] unintermittently through the Syllable Om. Because this is the one illuminator of man.’ As it is said: Indeed, this Syllable is sacred, this Syllable is the highest one; he who knows this Syllable—whatever he wishes is allotted to him (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:3, 4).

Much of this has already been considered, but in the fourth verse there is an important reference. Om is said to be “the guide or propeller which is in the form of light.” In the Rig Veda there is a mantra known as the Savitri Gayatri which is recited for unfoldment of the intellectual powers leading to enlightenment. When speaking of the divine sun of enlightenment, Brahman, it prays: “May it impel us towards That.” Sri Ramakrishna said that Om is the essence of the Gayatri mantra—that its recitation eventually replaces the Gayatri entirely. This is borne out by the upanishad. Om itself is the Light that propels us towards union with the Light—with Om.

Although it has become the custom in Vedic religion to recite volumes of Sanskrit hymns and mantras in worship, the Vedic Rishis understood that all worship could be done by the recitation of Om. Even more, they realized that real worship of God consisted of offering oneself to God by entering into union with him. And Om effected that union—that worship. Nothing more was needed.

Just as the sun is the sole illuminator of the world (at least in the natural order of things), so the upanishad declares Om to be “the one illuminator of man.”

“And in another place it is said: The Syllable Om is its [Brahman’s] sound-form. [A long listing of the various forms of Brahman follows; and in conclusion the upanishad says:] Therefore, when one says Om, all the previously mentioned ones are adored and are included, along with it [Brahman]. As it is said: Indeed, O

Satyakama, this Syllable Om is the higher and the lower Brahman (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:5).

By the invocation of Om, God in all his manifestations—as well as his unmanifest Being—is worshipped. Japa and meditation of Om is the highest form of worship, therefore Sri Ramanuja, the great Indian philosopher, taught that meditation is the real bhakti (devotion) and jnana (wisdom).

By the Syllable Om he ascends. Through that he attains to the state of egolessness and on account of egolessness, he does not participate in joy or sorrow but he attains to absoluteness (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:21).

The little joys and sorrows of earth which are produced by the (actually) small things of earth are no more for him who ascends to the highest by means of Om.

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. Then further it is said: This is the way, this is immortality, this is communion and blessed happiness. Particularly, 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.

Transcending this Word-Brahman which carries individual characteristics in itself, they disappear in the highest, wordless, unmanifest Brahman. In that place they are without individual qualities, without individual differences, just like the manifold juices of flowers which have entered into the honey.

For it is said: One must know two Brahmans: the Word-Brahman and the highest Brahman. He who is proficient in the Word-Brahman attains the highest Brahman also.

And 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, which is devoid of fear and sorrow, which is bliss, satiated [full of contentment], firm, unmoving, immortal, unshaking, steady, which bears the name of Vishnu and leads to the place elevated above all. That is why one should worship these both. As it is said: The highest God and the lower One, who is called Om by name, one, becoming speechless and vacant [without any extraneous thought] should meditate (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:22, 23).

The Maitri Upanishad gives it this way:

There are, verily, two Brahman to be meditated upon, sound and non-sound. By sound alone is the non-sound revealed. Now here the sound is Om. Moving upward by it one comes to ascend in the non-sound. So this is the way, this is immortality, this is complete union and also tranquility. And as the spider moves upward by the thread, obtains free space, thus assuredly, indeed the meditator moving upward by the Syllable Om attains freedom.

There are two Brahman to be known, the sound-Brahman and what is higher. Those who know the sound-Brahman get to the higher Brahman. What is the sound is the Syllable Om. That which is its end is tranquil, soundless, fearless, sorrowless, blissful, satisfied, steadfast, unmoving, immortal, unshaking, enduring, called Vishnu; for obtaining what is higher than everything, let him reverence these two. For thus is it said: He who is both higher and lower, that God known by the name of Om is soundless and void of being too. And thus it has been said elsewhere: The body is the bow. The arrow is Om. The mind is its point, darkness is the mark. Having pierced through the darkness, one goes to what is not enveloped in darkness. Then having pierced through what is thus enveloped one sees Brahman.

These verses are specifically speaking about the meditation of Om, by means of which the objective Syllable Om becomes reduced to its subtle forms. Those who ascend in this way by means of Om are the real Ascended Masters.

The upanishad assures us here that the practice of japa and meditation of Om is itself the guarantee of success to the seeker.

And in another place it is said: The body is the bow, the Syllable Om is the arrow, the mind is the tip [of the arrow], darkness is the target; when one pierces through darkness, he reaches the place not obscured by darkness. He who has pierced that which is obscured has seen Brahman, which is comparable to a sparkling wheel of sparks, which has the splendor like that of the sun, which is filled with power, and which is beyond darkness. That Brahman shines in that yonder sun, as well as in the moon, in the fire, and in the lightning, and when he has seen him, he enters into immortality.

As it is said: Absorption [meditation] directed on the inner Self nevertheless grasps also the external objectives. Thus the objectless consciousness is made again objective. Still the bliss which ensues when the mind is merged with the Self—with the Self only as witness—is Brahman, the pure, eternal one. It is the true way, it is the true world (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:24).

The darkness which the upanishad says is the target is the “divine darkness,” the state of “unknowing” which leads to the Light of Knowing. This is the entire subject of the medieval Western spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Brahman, being beyond the senses, is itself often called “darkness” in the sense that it cannot be beheld by either the outer eyes or the inner eye of the mind and intellect. But the eye of spirit can indeed behold it; and shall. For that darkness will be found to be the true Light—all other light being but darkness and shadow.

The “wheel of sparks” which is said to be like Brahman is the *alatachakra*: a firebrand that is being whirled about so it forms a continuous orb of light that emits sparks in all directions, the sparks being the individual spirits that exist ever in the One Spirit, yet seem to emerge from him and enter into relative existence with its attendant bondage.

The second part of this verse supports that which many contemporary sages have said: At first in our search for God we follow the path of negation, saying *neti, neti*—this is not God, that is not God—in relation to the world and its experiences. But when we find God and

are united with him we reverse this and declare that “this” and “that” are God—and so, in a mysterious way, are we. That which heretofore was seen as unreal is then known to be real. Through meditation we abandon objective consciousness for subjective consciousness so we may again return to objective consciousness—but now illumined by the experience of the Divine Subject: God.

And in another place it is said: When one, with his senses held down or dormant as in sleep, sees, in the cave of the sense-organs, still not under the sway of the senses, through the purest thought, as in a dream, that director, the Atman called the Pranava, who is formed of light, who is slumberless, ageless, deathless, and sorrowless, because it is said: Because it binds together prana and Om and all the manifoldness or because it unites them in itself, it is, on that account, called Yoga.

And in another place it is said: Just as the fisher pulls out the creatures living in water within his net and sacrifices them into the fire of his body [the “fire” of digestion], so also, indeed, one, as if, pulls out the pranas with the Syllable Om and sacrifices them into sorrowless fire (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:25, 26).

“The purest thought” by which Brahman is perceived is the subtlest form of Om as experienced in meditation.

Here, too, we see that Om is both Yogi and Yoga. And the Cosmic Fire of Brahman.

He who knocks down [unseats] the ego [ahankara] and journeys on the ship of Om beyond the ether in the heart, in him the inner ether in the heart [that is Brahman] becomes manifest by and by (Maitrayana Upanishad 6:28).

By this we learn that Om is the vanquisher of ego, *ahankara*, the false sense of “I” as separate from God. When that is done, then Om is the ship that will carry us over the ocean of ignorance into the harbor of God. The “by and by” spoken of here may be long or it may be short, but Brahman will become manifest in the Om yogi.

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

Here again we see that the inconceivable and infinite God can be worshipped by means of Om. For Om is itself that God.

The essence or nature of the ether found in the cave [of the heart, *bridaya guba*] is, indeed, that highest power. The essence or nature of the ether found in the cave [of the heart] is, indeed, that Syllable Om. Through it that power breaks or sallies forth, ascends, and is breathed out; it may be without intermission, or it may be as a support for the meditation on Brahman.

In this process [of the Supreme Power which is the Pranava becoming active and moving forth or upward], that power, during the motion of prana, emerges as the warmth throwing the light into the background; and just as it occurs during the wafting of smoke [upwards and about], after it [that power] has sprung up as a twig in the ether of the heart, it unfolds itself further and becomes another twig or branch after the other one [rising up into infinity], just as when a lump of salt is thrown into water or just as the heat [rises] in the melted butter or just as the thought of one who meditates extends itself [into infinity] (Maitrayana Upanishad 7:11a).

Tangled as the above seems, the idea is that during meditation Om attaches itself to the subtle inner movement of prana and changes into a whisperlike form similar to the sound or movement of respiration, and keeps going through an almost infinite variety of permutations as it becomes increasingly subtle.

It is said in the upanishads that the inmost consciousness of the human being is like two branches upon which two birds are sitting. On one branch a bird sits eating the fruit of the tree, while on the other branch the bird sits merely observing the other bird and its eating of the fruit. The first bird is said to be the individual consciousness which eats the fruits of its actions in the form of karma. The second bird is the Supreme Consciousness which observes the individual spirit in transcendent detachment and silence. Both the experience of the individual and the witnessing of the Cosmic Being are made possible

by the “branching” of Om. Both rest upon Om for the experiencing and the witnessing.

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. That is why one should worship that immeasurable Power through the Syllable Om (Maitrayana Upanishad 7:11b).

In the Rig Veda it is said that the evil ones, the Vritras, hid the sun in a cave so darkness would prevail upon the earth. The aspiring ones, the Aryas, searched for the sun. When they found the cave, by means of Om, the *satya-mantra*—the mantra that reveals the Truth [God], or the mantra that embodies the Truth [God]—they broke open the sealed cave and the sun rose into the sky and enlightened the world. That is why the upanishad earlier says: “Through it that power breaks or sallies forth, and ascends.”

Om, when uttered, “illuminates the whole body like lightning.” When our consciousness is centered on Om, then our bodies, physical, astral, and causal, are filled with the Light of God by its invocation. Om is both Life and Light. What else, then, can we offer God in worship than himself in the form of Om?

Maitri Upanishad

One should continuously worship Brahman with the Syllable Om. For thus it is said, This Syllable indeed, is holy, this Syllable indeed is supreme. By knowing that Syllable indeed, whatever one desires becomes his. And then it has been said elsewhere, This Om is the sound form of this [Self]. Therefore by the utterance of the Syllable Om all these forms [of Brahman] are praised, worshipped, and ascribed. For thus it is said: This Syllable Om, verily, is the higher and lower Brahman (Maitri Upanishad 6:4, 5).

It is the continuous invocation of Om that is the worship of God (Brahman). Om is what is offered, Om is the act of offering, and Om is the One who receives the offering. “Brahman is the ritual, Brahman

is the offering, Brahman is he who offers to the fire that is Brahman. If a man sees Brahman in every action, he will find Brahman” (Bhagavad Gita 4:24). Only by the all-encompassing Om can we worship the all-encompassing Brahman. Only God can be offered to God.

Because in this manner he joins the prana, 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] 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).

Most of this is found in the Maitrayana recension of the upanishad, but the final part about the union of Om and prana during japa is not. The japa of Om greatly energizes and enlivens the Om Yogi on all the levels of his being. At the same time, though, it gathers up (“draws in”) the scattered life energies, harmonizes, and causes them to flow correctly in their intended channels.

One should meditate with the Syllable Om on that Unlimited Splendor [that is God] (Maitri Upanishad 6:37).

The renowned mantra of the Rig Veda, the Gayatri Mantra, begins: “We meditate upon that Boundless Splendor” that is God.

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. 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. On this point they quote: 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. Therefore one should meditate with the Syllable Om, that boundless Light

(Maitri Upanishad 7:11).

This is very like the Maitrayana recension, but there are some interesting differences, such as more exposition on the relation of Om to the inner movement of prana (“breathing”).

Smoke is used as a simile to illustrate that the cumulative effect of the repetition of Om is like a spiraling upward of smoke, the vibration rising higher and higher to the Absolute and acting as a thread up which the soul ascends to the Absolute.

The invocation of Om is compared to throwing salt into water because it pervades the entire being of the sadhaka with the divine vibration. It is also like the heating of butter because it causes the form to merge into the Formless, just as butter becomes one homogeneous mass when heated. So those who meditate on Om enter “that boundless Light” that is Om, that is God.

Mandalabrahman Upanishad

One who concentrates his mind on the Pranava and its import [bhava] experiences the internal radiance that alone is the real form of the Pranava (Mandalabrahman Upanishad 2.2.1).

That should be known as the other shore reached by one embarked on the boat of knowledge, after crossing the ocean of ignorance. That is the object of the quest through external and internal introspection. In the middle of it the world reposes. That is what lies beyond the range of Nada, Bindu, and Kala, the indivisible expanse [the one essence of consciousness]. That is of the form of the qualified [saguna] and the unqualified [nirguna] Atman. He who knows that stands liberated (Mandalabrahman Upanishad 2:4).

Of the sound produced in the anahata of the heart, there is the reverberation of that sound; there is radiance penetrating the interior of that reverberation. There is the mind penetrating the interior of that radiance: which mind is the doer of the deed of

creating, sustaining, and destroying the three worlds. Wherein that mind meets with dissolution, that is the supreme state of Vishnu [Brahman] (Mandalabrahman Upanishad 5:4).

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).

Mukti Upanishad

Contemplate me as...the one Syllable Om (Mukti Upanishad 2.2.77).

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 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).

The “arrow sharpened by meditation” is the inner consciousness that has been refined (sharpened) by the practice of meditation. Om aims at the Highest and reaches it through its japa and meditation. This being so, the upanishad tell us to “dismiss other utterances” and make Om the beginning, middle, and end of our life and our spiritual practice (sadhana).

Nadabindu Upanishad

This entire upanishad is on the subject of Om, but it is extremely abstruse, and the Sanskrit is so ancient (being a part of the Rig Veda) that it is not easy to translate. The first section is better summarized as follows: “The Swan, which is the vehicle of Brahma, of divine consciousness, is really the Omkara. All worlds are located within it.” Then the actual translation continues:

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.

In Vedic mythology which is profoundly symbolic, Brahma the Creator is said to have a swan as his vehicle. Swans are considered symbols of perfect discrimination since they can separate water from milk by means of an acidic secretion which turns milk into curds, which they then eat, leaving the water. So the idea is that divine consciousness “rides upon”—is the crown of—viveka, the discrimination between the true and the false, between God and delusion. There is another meaning when applied to the Pranava. Just as the swan flies on two wings, so also the yogi ascends to the spiritual heights on the two letters O and M combined. Japa and meditation of Om may also be considered as flying on the two wings of the Divine Swan.

Assuming the meditation posture, and all the while introspecting, the yogi should listen to the sound [of Om]. This sound, when constantly practiced, will drown every sound from outside. By persisting in the practice in the same manner further and further, the sound will be heard subtler and subtler. In this manner will various kinds of sound be heard, growing subtler and subtler. Even when loud sounds, such as of the kettle-drum and the like, are heard therein, the yogi should take into consideration only the subtle, and the subtler ones. He should not shift elsewhere his mind, which is diverting itself in the subtle. The mind, lost in that sound forgetting everything outside, becomes one with it, like water and milk and forthwith merges with the Chidakasha [the Ether of Consciousness]. The yogi with mental control, by constant practice, becomes indifferent to everything else and is attracted by such Nada [the subtle forms of Om experienced in meditation] alone as would transport him beyond his mind. Leaving off all thoughts and devoid of all action, he should meditate upon Nada alone. The mind will then merge completely in the Nada.

Nada Yoga or Laya Yoga, is the practice of listening to the subtle inner sounds, especially of the repetitions of Om. Here the upanishad gives us invaluable counsel: do not bother with other sounds, including those of the chakras, when they arise, but be intent only on the increasingly subtler sounds of Om. Ignoring all other sounds, we should follow the thread of the subtle Pranava to reach the Pure Consciousness that is the Goal.

Even as the bee drinks the honey and does not like the sweet scents, the mind, always captivated by nada or sweet sound, has no relish for any other functioning; bound by the rope of a little [or subtle] sweet sound, it gives up its fickle nature in a trice. The mind, the snake abiding in the hole of the interior of the body, caught by the snake-charmer of sweet sound, completely forgetting the world, does not run anywise, becoming one-pointed. For the infatuated lord of elephants of the mind, roaming about the pleasure garden of the objects of desire, this sharp goad of sweet sound commands

the ability to bring it under control. Sound plays the part of the net, which ensnares the deer in the interior of the body, viz., the mind. It likewise plays the part of the dike in stemming the tide in the interior of the body, viz., the mind.

The nada [the Pratyagatman] of the Pranava, wherein manifests Brahman, is self-luminous. The mind finds its repose therein.... As long as the sound persists, so long does the conception of akasha or Ether persist. The transcendent Atman devoid of sound is termed the Paramatman. As long as there is the sound, so long does the mind persist. When the sound ceases, the mind is out of element. The Pranava is endowed with sound; when its principal letter [either *o* or *m*] vanishes, there comes on the quiescent state, the transcendent state of Brahman. From constant application to the nada [sound] of the Pranava, the impressions [samskaras] left by the past will be obliterated. Then the mind and the vital air [prana] will merge in the detached Atman; there is no doubt. The myriads of thousands of means to the attainment of the all-witness, the nada [the sound], the myriads of hundreds of devices adopted for the attainment of the Ishwara, the bindu of the Pranava—all of them find their last resting place in the nada of the Pranava, wherein is manifest Brahman, which is no other than the innermost Atman (Nadabindu Upanishad, 31-51).

Past life impressions (samskaras), taking the form of reflexive, instinctual actions and thoughts emanating from the subconscious, are themselves the forces of karma. So to wipe out our karma we must wipe out the samskaras through meditation on Om.

All viable spiritual paths (practices) lead to Om. So it is only wisdom to become involved with it from the very beginning.

Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad

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.

He should ever be intent upon the realization, through

meditation, of the Brahma Pranava [the Pranava that is Brahman] (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VII).

To realize Om through continuous japa and meditation is to realize Brahman itself.

It is necessary for all to mediate 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).

Narada asked Parameshthi [the Exalted One: Brahma] to enlighten him about the samsara taraka—that Pranava which lifts one out of samsara. Assenting to this, Brahma began thus: Omkara that is Brahman is the vyashti [individual] and the samashti [cosmic]. What is the individual? What is the cosmic? The Brahma Pranava is of three kinds: Samhara [destructive] Pranava, Shrishti [creative] Pranava, and Ubhayatmaka [belonging to both] Pranava, as being of two forms, internal and external (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

It is the Pranava, Om, that delivers us from the sea of rebirth and confers liberation upon us. Although one, and of a single, unified consciousness, yet, being Brahman, it is also many; and some of its aspects are being presented here.

Om is *sambhara*—that which cuts off and dissolves—in relation to all impurity and ignorance. At the same time it is the power of creation, of manifestation, in relation to all that is true and divine in nature. It is therefore *ubhayatmaka*—simultaneously destructive and creative. This also is the nature of Brahman, the producer of both manifestation and dissolution. The Pranava cuts off and dissolves that which is unreal and brings about the rise and establishment of That which is Real. And it does so on the level of the microcosm, the vyashti, and on the level of the macrocosm, the samashti. All states of existence are embraced by it, both the part and the whole. It is the life of the individual spirit and of the Supreme Spirit equally. And it is That which unites the two into One.

It is also eight: Antah Pranava, Vyavaharika Pranava, Bahya Pranava, Arsha Pranava, Ubhayatmaka or Virat Pranava, Samahara Pranava, Brahma Pranava, and Ardhamatra Pranava (Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

It is the *Antah Pranava*, the internal or indwelling Pranava, for it is the nature of consciousness—our own nature. It is the inmost, the most subtle, productive of all internal states and movements. Yet it is also the *Vyavaharika Pranava*, the power that manifests in all cosmic activity, producing all phenomenon. Thus it is also the *Bahya Pranava*, the external Pranava. It is the primal, holy mantra revealed to the Vedic Rishis, the *Arsha Pranava*. It is the all-containing (*Ubhayatmaka*) or cosmic (*Virat*) *Pranava*. But it also dissolves the cosmos as the *Samahara Pranava*. It is The Word That Is God, the *Brahman Pranava* of subtle (*Ardhamatra*) Form. All things are the Pranava; the Pranava is all things.

Om is Brahman. Know that the mantra of the one-syllabled Om is Pranava.... It is saguna [with qualities] and nirguna [beyond all qualities]. Though the Brahma Pranava is one only, its is the substratum of all, the support of the whole universe, of the form of all letters, time, Vedas, and Shiva. [In this instance, “Shiva” means the Supreme Brahman.] This Omkara that is mentioned in the Upanishads of the Vedas should be sought after. 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. 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]. To the aspirants after liberation, its is the support, like the sun, everywhere; its is the Atma Jyoti [Light of the Self]. As its alone is Brahman, this One-Lettered Brahman is shining always (Narada Parivrajaka

Upanishad, Upadesha VIII).

Narasingha Tapini Upanishad

The Pranava is the true form of the Savitri Gayatri which has the sun as its presiding deity. Once Prajapati [the Creator] spoke to the gods, saying: The Pranava is both the Atman and Brahman; they are united to each other. The Atman of the four states and the Pranava are one (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

Here, again, we see that those who invoke Om obtain the result of reciting the Savitri Gayatri for enlightenment.

When those greatly evolved beings we call “gods” sought for spiritual knowledge so they could evolve to even higher states, God himself taught them about Om.

The “four states” are waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep, and pure consciousness (turiya).

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.... Should for some unforeseen reason or other the actual perception of the turiya-turiya be unattained in this life, such attainment is surely to be had at least in the next, next after, or another incarnation (Narasingha Tapini Upanishad).

Those who practice Om Yoga will attain total and perfect liberation in *at least* four lifetimes. So the upanishad assures us, and so we can prove for ourselves.

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).

“The culmination of the turiya-turiya Omkara” is reached through the practice of meditation.

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).

God is often spoken of as higher or lower, with form (Saguna) or without form (Nirguna), as Immanent or Transcendent, as Personal or Impersonal. But there is a state beyond these metaphysical dualities where the question of either/or simply cannot arise; where no appellations whatsoever can be used, or are even possible. This verse affirms that fact. Through Om that state which is really beyond all states can be attained.

[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).

This upanishad also contains two sections, virtually impossible to translate, which tells how Om unites the individual soul with the Universal Soul and the Absolute Brahman, making the three into one. In these sections there are references to Om as having four “horns,” to which the consciousness is to be bound, the “horns” representing the four states of consciousness, individual and cosmic.

Narasingha Purva-Tapiniya Upanishad

He who is the exalted God Narasingha [Vishnu] is also Om; to him be salutations.

At the center of the wheel of creation is the Deliverer, the Syllable Om, which single Syllable denotes Narasingha.

Most of the material on Om in the Mandukya Upanishad is cited in this upanishad, but the likening of Om to the hub of a wheel is unique to it and presents two ideas: 1) Creation has emanated from Om as its center. 2) Om binds all creation into a unity. On the personal level this

tells us that Om is the center, the seed-core of our very being, and that meditation on Om will bind our scattered forces back into their primal unity, thus making us one with ourselves as a prerequisite for becoming one with God. This upanishad also lists the various scriptures and their adjuncts at length with the concluding statement:

One who studies the Pranava thereby studies everything—yea, he thereby studies everything.

Narasingha Uttara-Tapiniya Upanishad

Once the gods said to Prajapati [the Creator]: Proclaim to us Om which, being that Atman, is minuter than the minute [subtler than the most subtle]. Let it be so, said he.

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. 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 its this whole threefold world, for one should know that the world consists of its, 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.

One should make the Atman one with the Unborn by means of Om.

There is no difference between Atman, Om, and the universe.

Om is the Atman himself. One who knows this has his jivatman merged in the Paramatman.

On the great throne of one's own heart one should install the Atman by means of Om. [This is a reference to the ritual known as *prana-pratishtha*—installation of life—which is done to an image when it is set on the altar of a temple at its consecration. This ritual makes the image alive in a subtle—but no less real—sense.]

With the Pranava consisting of bliss and immortality one should worship Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.”

Narayana Upanishad

He [Narayana: Vishnu] merged into one with the inner bliss, Brahman, the Purusha, the holy Syllable consisting of a, u, and m; and its became the sound Om. The yogi who has seen [experienced] this is free from birth and samsara.

So pious was Devaki's son, so pious was Madhusudana, as it is said, [because he perceived] him who dwells in all beings, one, Narayana, the cause, the causeless, the highest Brahman in the Omkara (Narayana Upanishad 5).

Here again Vishnu (Narayana) is declared to be the mantric Syllable Om. Furthermore, this verse indicates that Krishna (the son of Devaki, also called Madhusudana), who is considered an incarnation of Narayana (Vishnu), meditated upon God by means of Om.

Pancha Brahma Upanishad

Sri Ramakrishna was unsurpassed as a teacher who could illuminate the most abstruse philosophical concepts in a single sentence—or less. When asked: “What is the Self (Atman)?” his answer was: “The witness of the mind.” This is the teaching of the Pancha Brahman Upanishad about God, which says:

You should understand that Ishana [the Lord] is the witness of the buddhi (intellect) intelligence and is the activator of the mind. He is boundless and beyond all knowing. He is indicated by Om (Pancha Brahman Upanishad 6).

The Lord, also is seated in the heart of each one of us as the Eternal Witness.

“I am the Atman that dwells in the heart of every mortal creature: I am the beginning, the life-span, and the end of all” (Bhagavad Gita 10:20).

“The Lord lives in the heart of every creature. He turns them round and round upon the wheel of his Maya” (Bhagavad Gita 18:61).

Parabrahman Upanishad

The Pranava is the Atman.... To the ascetics seeking liberation, the basis of the sacred thread is Pranava alone.... The Pranava is the sacred thread.

In Vedic religion, the sacred thread (yajnopavita) must be worn for the performance of the fire sacrifice (yajna). This verse thus means that Om both qualifies the yogi for the “sacrifice” of Self-realization as well as *being* that sacrifice itself. That is, Om is both the means and the end. Moreover, the sacred thread is formed of three strands that represent the three letters of Om (a, u, and m).

Paramahansa Parivrajaka Upanishad

The Paramahansa Parivrajaka Upanishad refers to Om as “the Brahma Pranava”—Pranava-that-is-God—and has a section in which,

like the Tarasara Upanishad, it is stated that Om contains all the sixteen states of consciousness.

Pashupatabrahman Upanishad

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

The Pranava is the Sacred Thread [Brahmasutra] and the Divine Sacrifice [Brahmayajna] as well (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 17).

The consciousness “I am He” [“I am Brahman”] is inherent in the Pranava. There is no difference between the [statement] “I am He” and the Pranava (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 19).

Liberation is not within the reach of any but the person who has developed the faculty of meditating on the Pranava (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 26).

I am the Pranava, which is the Deliverer [Taraka], the radiance of “I am He” (Pashupatabrahman Upanishad 32).

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

Pranagnihotra Upanishad

In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali it is stated that the path to superconsciousness (samadhi) is the offering of the life to God (Ishwarapranadana). “Pranagnihotra” means “The Fire-Sacrifice of Life” and describes how the human being is the sacrificial altar, implements, etc., with his life being the offering. In verse 18 it says that the sacrificial fire is Om. In ancient India it was believed that the fire destroyed the material part of the offerings, but thereby transferred

the subtle, spiritual part into the heavenly realms. The inference is that Om is that which transfers or transmutes our earthly consciousness into divine consciousness.

In verse 22, Om is called “the sacrificial post,” meaning that our consciousness is to be “tied” of Om in order to accomplish the sacrifice-offering of our life—ourselves—to God.

Pranava Upanishad

Brahman created Brahma in a lotus flower. The latter deliberated: Which is the one Word by which all desires are obtained and all worlds, gods, Vedas, sacrifices, rewards of the sacrifices, everything movable and immovable is known? He practiced tapas [meditation]. After he had practiced the tapas, he saw that Syllable [Om] which is all-encompassing, all-ruling, ever new, the Brahman. Then he obtained all desires, all worlds, gods, Vedas, sacrifices, all the movable and the immovable. [There follows a long list of divine and created things which Brahma obtained by doing japa of Om.]”

This Pranava, the one Syllable [Om], originated before the tapas, is Brahman, the seed of the Veda; all mantras have sprung from this Pranava.

It is stated that Om preceded the tapas of Brahma lest it be thought that Om is not eternal, but originated in response to the meditation of Brahma. Being Brahman itself, Om has never come into existence, nor will its ever cease to be. Sri Ramakrishna said: “From the same Om have come Om Shiva, Om Kali and Om Krishna” (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Majumdar translation: 5.13.1). All mantras are but extensions or evolutes of Om. Thus by the invocation of Om itself we can obtain or produce the results and effects of all mantras.

The gods intoned Om and defeated the asuras by the help of the Pranava. Therefore one says the word Om in all sacred activities, and one who does not know its is not capable of accomplishing such activity. But one who knows its has the Veda in his power.

That is why when one utters its at the beginning of the Rig Veda, its is the Rig Veda; when one utters its at the beginning of the Yajur Veda, its is the Yajur Veda; when one utters its at the beginning of the Sama Veda, its is the Sama Veda. And in every work, because one utters Pranava at the beginning, That is its form—the form of it.

Asuras are demons, and here symbolize the evil tendencies in the human being.

Om should be orally or mentally intoned whenever spiritual work is to be done. Being Pranava, the Life-giver, it suffuses us with the power to perform that work successfully and completely. In all spiritual actions we need the divine power of Om to empower us for their accomplishment.

The statement about how, when recited at their beginning, Om is the Veda that is going to be recited, means that the mantras (verses) of the Vedas are all extensions, variations, and permutations of Om. And the statement that the Pranava uttered at the beginning of a work becomes its form indicates that Om becomes the subtle thought-form which is the matrix around which the projected action is formed and successfully accomplished.

Like Brahman, Om encompasses everything. Om is particularly the glory of the Vedas. Everything, movable and immovable, has arisen from Om.

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, separative consciousness] as the pure Atman.

Prashna 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: 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).

All plant, animal, and human life on this planet depends 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 a sensitive man can tell when the sun rises and sets above him. 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. The sun initiates the entire solar system into Om. Human beings are solar creatures, therefore to intone Om is the most natural things they can do.

Rama-Rahashya Upanishad

The king of mantras is the Ekakshara (Om) which is the storehouse of fire, which is Lord Vishnu, and which is Lord Shiva (Rama-Rahashya Upanishad 2).

Om is the supreme mantra, and thus is Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Liberator.

For those desiring liberation, the vairagis [monks], as well

as house-holders, and in all stages of life, constant meditation of Om—especially for tapaswins [yogis and monks]—is enjoined; for the knowers of the mantra doubtless become liberated while alive (Rama-Rahashya Upanishad 5).

As regards the japa of Om [Pranava] alone: whoever is qualified to do japa of the six-syllabled mantra of Rama is also eligible to do the japa of Om [Pranava japa], and I bring about their well-being (Rama-Rahashya Upanishad).

The Rama-Rahashya Upanishad in several places refers to Om as “The Tara”—the Deliverer, the Crosser-Over [Omkara Taraka], and so does the Rama Tapini Upanishad. The Rama-Rahashya Upanishad further describes Om as a characteristic mantra of Lord Rama. Here again we see that there is no need for specialized mantras to worship or invoke any particular aspect of God. Om is sufficient for all.

Rama Tapini Upanishad

Brahman of absolute radiance and infinitude is identified with [one with] Om. The turiya-turiya of Brahman pervades the entire Pranava. Salutations to that Om which is the true form of Rama, and is the foremost of the Vedas (Rama Tapini Upanishad).

The first sentence may be translated in two other ways: “Om unites with the Brahman of absolute radiance and infinitude,” or “Om unites to Brahman and its infinite Radiance [Tejas]”—Tejas being a reference to the infinite Mahashakti or Mulaprakriti, which is also known as the Brahma Jyoti (Light of God; Light that *is* God). Om is the true form of God.

Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad

The Syllable Om is to be worshipped as consisting of Brahman, who is Satchidananda (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

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 its is called the Saving One. He who always remembers [through meditation and japa] this Saving One is saved by its from all sin, from all death, from samsara—from everything. He attains liberation, becomes great, and enters immortality (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

“The great fear” is a translation of *mahato bhayat*, a technical term used in the Bhagavad Gita (2:40) for all the attendant sufferings of earthly birth. Being Brahman itself, Om is the unfailing Savior of those who invoke its, saving them not only from the evils attendant on earthly life, but from taking future births as well.

Sprung from the *a*-sound, Lakshman is like the Wishwa; sprung from the *u*-sound, Shatrughna is the Tejasa. Sprung from the *m*-sound, Bharata is like the Prajna. To the Nada corresponds Rama, the embodiment of the bliss of Brahman. Nestling close against Rama, as the bestower of bliss on the world, creating, sustaining, dissolving all beings, one should know Her: that exalted Sita, She who is called Mulaprakriti; because She is the Pranava, the knowers of Brahman call Her Prakriti (Rama Uttara Tapiniya Upanishad).

All the brothers of Lord Rama, and Sita his consort, are declared to be manifestations of Om. All five are considered divine incarnations—avatars. So when we invoke Om we invoke them—as well as all gods and avatars.

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).

“I” denotes Om.... I am that which consists of Consciousness

[Chit], I am Om. That is Ramabhadra [the blessing or welfare bestowed by Rama], 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).

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

Rudrahridaya Upanishad

The Pranava is the bow. The Atman is the arrow. The Para-Brahman is the target. Just like the arrow, the Atman will become one with Brahman [through japa and meditation of the Pranava: Om].

When all is understood to be One, the Omkara, the Absolute, there is no sorrow, there is no Maya. Then the attainment of the Advaita-Paramananda [the bliss of non-duality] is very easy....All people cannot understand this Truth. Those devoid of Maya can know this secret. After knowing this, the Atman does not move towards any place at any time. It becomes one with the Absolute. Just as akasha does not move anywhere, similarly this Atman does not have any movement. It becomes one with Om.

One who knows this great secret Truth is the real sage. He becomes the Para-Brahman itself. He becomes Satchidananda. He attains permanent peace.

(The upanishad is brief, and for some reason the translation I have used has no verse numbers for the above.).

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).

Sandilya Upanishad

The Pranava alone becomes the pranayama (Sandilya Upanishad 6:2 [2:17]).

Another translation is: “Pranava only is said to be Pranayama.” In the same section, Om is described as “the Supreme Light.”

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 (Sandilya Upanishad 6:32).

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 (Sandilya Upanishad 2:46).

When the knowledge which is of the form of the Knowable, which is beneficent and which is untouched by any modifications arises in one and is known as Om only and no other, then the fluctuations of prana cease [and pranayama is achieved] (Sandilya Upanishad 2:51).

Brahman is Om (Sandilya Upanishad 3).

Sannyasa 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 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).

“Taraka-Nama” is “The Delivering Name”—Om.

Satyayani Upanishad

[The sage's] inner possession is Om, the Pranava. Till his final breath is out, he shall not abandon it (Satyayani Upanishad).

The attentive reciting of Om offers the Self into the fire of Brahman (Satyayani Upanishad 16).

Savitri Upanishad

The meditation (dharani or dhyanam) at the end of the Savitri Upanishad describes the Goddess Savitri as “adorned with the crown of the Pranava.”

Saubhagyalakshmi Upanishad

Pranayama is accomplished through concentrating the mind on Om (Saubhagyalakshmi Upanishad).

Prana not only means breath or the life force behind the breath, it also means life itself. Thus pranayama in the higher sense is control of life, mastery of birth, death, and all that lies in between the two. Japa and meditation of Om accomplish all this, and are the truest forms of pranayama.

Shaunaka Upanishad

Indra 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).

Indra is the king of the gods in Indian cosmology, but “Indra” is also a title of the Supreme Being. The import of this verse is that the Pranava imparts its greatness to all, but there are none that can impart glory to its as its is the Self-existent All.

The entire cosmos rests upon the vibration of Om. And whenever

Om is invoked, the vibrations that emanate strengthen and stabilize the creation itself. In this way the Om Yogi benefits not only himself but the entire universe and all within it.

When one says Om, all names and forms are contained in its; for the Pranava is everything and contains everything; therefore one calls its the One Syllable [ekakshara]....This sound grants victory and is constant and contains in it all beings; its is only a Syllable and yet infinite; being infinite its 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; its is the king of all syllables (Shaunaka Upanishad).

Om is said to be constant because its is always efficacious to the same degree—never fluctuating in the level of its power or effectiveness.

The Pranava is uttered softly and lightly in the mornings; for when the demons were near, the gods uttered its softly; there the Pranava became light to them and said: Lightly I shall crush your enemies....Then the Pranava said: I am everything...I am all syllables (Shaunaka Upanishad).

This verse is a reference to the spiritual practice known as the Sandhya which is done in the morning and evening for the aspirant to attune himself to the evolutionary solar energies and absorb them more readily. If this attunement is practiced daily until the end of life, the aspirant will be enabled to ascend through the sun to the higher worlds beyond rebirth.

All that is inimical to our perfect realization is easily defeated—“lightly crushed”—by the japa and meditation of Om.

The Pranava pondered: If I am as all syllables, then the gods will see all my forms, and that is not good. Then he withdrew all his forms within himself and concealed himself in the nada [the

subtle sound].... Therefore they [the gods] ran after him, in order to search for him. And they said: The power, the seed, the light, the indestructible, the flawless—all that is the nada. Therefore one obtains the light, the indestructible, the flawless through the nada (Shaunaka Upanishad).

Meditation on the subtle sound of Om is the way.

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; its invoked as my form.

[When the demons attacked the gods, Indra made Aditya (the Sun) the general of the gods and told him to invoke the Pranava.] Pranava said: The Udgitha is the manifestation of Aditya [the Sun], the manifestation of Brahman, and I am the manifestation of Brahman and not different from him. And he walked with his full form, which he had previously concealed in the Nada [of Om], in front of Aditya, and Aditya made him his weapon. Then he defeated the demons, and they were scattered as dust, so that they could not again come together. Thus the Pranava appeared in his full form and thereby earned great fame, for the Pranava is the pinnacle of greatness. All beings are contained in him, and his abode is in the Nada, for in it he had concealed himself.

Therefore, whatever one desires, one should request him for it, and the worship one performs belongs to him. For it is said: The Pranava has four horns, three feet, two heads, seven hands; threefold is he. Bound, great, loudly roaring, shining brightly, having entered into all the living beings [Rig Veda 4.58.3]. His four horns are the three and one half matra [time measures and letters]; his three feet are a, u, and m; his two heads are o and m; his seven hands are the seven notes [of the scale, svara], because he is sung in all the seven. Threefold bound are its three letters [a, u, m] with the three [sacrificial] fires, the three worlds, and the three Vedas; like these he is also spoken of.

The Pranava is Indra and therefore great. For it is said: The lord

over all gods, great is Indra, granting greatness, mitigating grief, full of light, helping all, ruler, mighty, granting strength, sustaining the universe, well-disposed to all. Because Indra supports himself in this way, therefore it was said that the Pranava rings loudly; and it rings loudly because all who worship him earn great fame. That he has entered into all living beings means that he dwells in all beings. Therefore one should worship Indra [God] by the Syllable Om (Shaunaka Upanishad).

In the second paragraph the Pranava is depicted as a conscious being—which, being Sound-Brahman, it is.

Japa and meditation of Om is the highest possible worship of God.

Shiva-Jnanamrita 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).

Om is the very image-manifestation of God. God being all power, Om is the ultimate Word of Power. Om creates, maintains, and dissolves the cosmos, and is therefore omnipotent and the power of evolution. Om is the essence of the Vedas, for all the Vedic mantras are only variations on Om. The world being God, Om is the essence of the world itself, the most effective means of both its evolution and its transcendence.

Pranava Sadhana consisting of the repetition of Om will remove all obstacles in the spiritual path (Shiva-Jnanamrita Upanishad 9).

“From the japa and meditation of Om result [come] the disappearance of obstacles and the turning inward of consciousness,” says the Yoga Sutras (1:29). There are no obstacles or problems that can arise as we tread the spiritual path that Om Yoga will not remove. This is a simple principle, but one that is easy to forget. When you run into snags in meditation, do not look for gimmicks or fixes—Om meditation itself will clear up the problems. You need nothing more. But what

about other obstacles that are more external, especially difficulties in our outer life, including negative karmas of all sorts, and especially negative life situations, including negative people, especially those that actively combat our spiritual endeavors? Om Yoga will take care of that, too. Just keep on practicing; do not slack off or stop meditating in order to placate or alleviate any negative situation or person. If you do, they will overcome you, cause you to lose both momentum and confidence, and derail your spiritual life. I have seen this happen many times. *Compromise never works.* Keep on, and let the Pranava clear the way.

Sita Upanishad

Sita was the wife of Lord Rama(chandra) and is worshipped as an incarnation of the Goddess Lakshmi (Sri). As such, the eighth verse says:

Sita must be known. She is the first cause. As Om is She that cause—so declare the Brahman-knowers.

Verse seventeen speaks of the Earth as a goddess (Bhu-Devi), and says: **Her essence is the Pranava.**

The twentieth verse says: **From Hari's [Vishnu's]mouth proceeds the Syllable Om.**

Suka Rahasya Upanishad

The supreme Brahman is inherent in Om.

Surya Upanishad

Brahman is the single Syllable Om.

Svetasvatara Upanishad

Om is the Supreme Brahman, and in its are the Triad. 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 (Svetasvatara Upanishad 1:7).

“Triad” refers to several levels of meaning: 1) the physical, astral, and causal worlds, 2) the three components of experience—the knower, the knowing, and the known; 3) past, present, and future; and 4) the Trimurti—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. All this is Om, which will free us from the bonds of birth and death.

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).

The knower of the real nature of Brahman that is identical with the Pranava, 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 the Pranava (Svetasvatara Upanishad 2:8).

Meditation gathers up and unites all our inner faculties and the mind, centering them in our “heart”—the core of our being where we and God are one. The upanishad assures us that by doing so we will be able to overcome all the problems and tangles of this life. It is the withdrawal from these problems and tangles through meditation that enable us to then turn and face them and conquer them.

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

Om is the Supreme Teacher of the Supreme Knowledge.

Taittiriya Upanishad

The Om that is the most exalted in the Vedas, that pervades all worlds, and that emerged from the immortal Vedas as their quintessence—may its, the supreme Lord, gratify me with intelligence. O Lord, may I be the receptacle of immortality. May my body be fit; may my tongue be surpassingly sweet; may I hear much through the ears. You are the sheath of Brahman: you are covered by (worldly) wisdom. Protect what I have learned (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).

“Om is all this” because Om is the Absolute and Om is the Relative that is the manifestation of the Absolute.

Tarasara Upanishad

Om is a single Syllable that is of the nature of the Self [atma]. Through Om Brahma is produced (Tarasara Upanishad).

The idea of the second sentence is that Brahma is the creator both through his meditation on Om, by means of which he attained his spiritual status, and through his projection of Om as the basic power of the manifested cosmos.

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 its alone should be worshipped.... He who knows this becomes immortal.

Om is “worshipped” by its japa and meditation.

Om is the true form of the Self [Atman]. The Syllable Om is Brahman. 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).

In Vedic cosmology it is considered that there are sixteen divisions (kalas) or stages of evolving consciousness, from a germ to that of an Avatara, a Son of God. Thus Om is the root of all possible states of consciousness and evolution, and the manifester of them as well.

Tejobindu Upanishad

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 very act of japa of Om is said to be Brahman (the Indivisible One Essence) itself because it is impossible without the will of God coming into play within the individual's consciousness for him to invoke Om. God is himself calling on himself through our japa of Om. And whatever God does is, truly, an extension of his being. Godly action is God. And nothing can be more godly than the invocation of Om.

Om is pure consciousness (Tejobindu Upanishad 6:39).

Tripadvibhuti Mahanarayana Upanishad

That blissful Supreme Being (Brahman) which resides within, is of the form of Om—the Pranava....The blessed one, who recites and chants the Syllable Om gets rid of all the bindings and bonds of this material world.... He resides within all beings, and controls all their activities. He is the form of the Syllable Om, the Supreme Being (Tripadvibhuti Mahanarayana Upanishad).

Tripura Tapini Upanishad

The letters A, U, and M, constituting the Pranava, denote the inward bliss, the all-pervading Brahman. Putting them together, there is formed: Om (Tripura Tapini Upanishad 4:16).

Turiyatita Avadhuta Upanishad

[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 (Turiyatita Avadhuta Upanishad).

Another translation is: “[The sage] gives up his body as he has become one with Om, the Pranava. Such an ascetic is an Avadhuta; he has accomplished his life’s purpose.”

Varaha Upanishad

Like the unbroken stream of oil and the long resounding tolling of a bell, the topmost note of the Pranava cannot be uttered [aloud]. He who knows that [topmost note of the Pranava] is the knower of the Veda.

The Pranava [Om] burns away sins; the Pranava bestows liberation; the Pranava bestows abundance. By Pranava japa the yogi attains the fruits just mentioned. The Pranava is uttered like the unbroken stream of oil and the long resounding tolling of a bell. He who knows that [Pranava] is the knower of the Veda. Know that the mantra [Om] bestows grace that it might prove fruitful. Hence the Pranava removes all obstacles and destroys all defects (Varaha Upanishad 5:68-71).

The “topmost note of the Pranava” is the subtle sound of Om that is experienced in meditation, that cannot be “uttered” in the way of ordinary speech.

Vasudeva Upanishad

The one Pranava alone has become many. The Lord of Om takes you above (Vasudeva Upanishad 4).

Vedantasara Upanishad

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

It is an important principle of all life—including spiritual life—that if you do not start out with what you want you will not end up with it, either. If you do not begin with gold you will not end up with a gold ornament. If you do not begin with marble you will not end up with a marble sculpture. There is no “path” or “thing” that leads to God. You must begin with God to end up with God. God alone is the way to himself, he alone is the truth regarding himself, and he alone is the life in himself. Om, then, being the purest form of divine consciousness, is the Way to God. Japa and meditation of Om are the means to “directly realize the Self” that is one with God. For Om is not only the true Name of God, Om is the true name of our own atma-spirit.

Yajnavalkya Upanishad

Om is the mantra of liberation and the essence of the Vedas. Brahman is indicated by Om alone (Yajnavalkya Upanishad).

The second sentence being so, we can say with assurance that Om is the actual True Name of God, all other “names” being but descriptive titles, however venerable or sacred.

Yoga Tattva Upanishad (A).

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 63, 64).

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 1:69, 70; 2:5-14, 18, 19).

We have already seen in the quotations from the Rama Uttara Tapiniya, Nadabindu, Sannyasa, and Varaha Upanishads that Om purifies us from all sins. But just what is “sin”? In Sanskrit the word is *papa*—darkness or impurity in the sense of a blot that obscures or mars our consciousness. Think of a glass through which light is shining. “Sin” is anything like dirt, dust, or smudges that hinder the light from shining through. Sin is not the transgression of some arbitrary divine law, but the transgression-obscuration of our own nature. It is in truth an “offense again God” but not in the usual, misunderstood sense. Rather, sin is an offense against our own divinity. Consequently, sin is not removed by tears or prayers to God, but by our own self-cleansing. It is up to us, and none other. And the way we purify ourselves is by the japa and meditation of Om.

He who understands that which is indestructible and is the meaning of Om—by him are all these worlds attained. This [Om] is the Truth, the Supreme Seat (Yoga Tattva Upanishad 134-136).

Yoga Tattva Upanishad (B).

There are three worlds, three Vedas, three times of day [for worship, the Sandhyas], three gods [Brahman, Vishnu, and Shiva], three sacrificial fires [fire rites], and three Gunas [qualities or modes of Prakriti, the creative energy]. The three-lettered Om comprehends all these in itself. 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. And just

as in a crystal the light of the sun is reflected, so Om shines in the soul, inspiring it, the highest Spirit by means of Yoga (Yoga Tattva Upanishad 6-11).

Through sound we reach the Silence.

By fixing the mind well and constantly on the Pranava, peace and tranquillity are attained (Yoga Tattva Upanishad).

The Pranava is the surest way to peace.

Whoever at the end of the three-lettered Om meditates on the half-syllable [the Nada of meditation] also, he pervades through all this and finally goes to the highest place. [Through Om he pervades all things] as fragrance is in a flower, as butter is in milk, as oil is in the sesame, as gold is in the ore (Yoga Tattva Upanishad).

Yogachudamanya Upanishad

One should recite the imperishable Omkara as japa (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 71).

Om is the eternal, the pure, the awakened, the indeterminate, the flawless, the indescribable, That which has neither origin nor dissolution, the One, the Turiya, That which ever remains one through the revolutions of the past, the present, and the future, the always indivisible, the transcendent Brahman itself. All this is the Pranava.... The Pranava is the All-witness in all kinds of jivas, always in their interior, untouched by their actions (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 72, 73).

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

The Pranava will tend upwards in the case of the enlightened.

Thus will the Pranava stand. He who knows that is the knower of the Veda (Yogachudamanya Upanishad 79).

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).

Om is the transcendent radiance wherein desire, action, and so also knowledge, inhere in a threefold manner as Brahma, Rudra, and Vishnu. One should utter that by mouth, practice that with his body, and should utter that mentally, every day. 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 86-88).

Yogashikha 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).

That mantra, made up of Shiva and Shakti [divine consciousness and Divine Power], is the Pranava. He who, having understood its real nature, is capable of expounding or hearing that mantra is rare indeed. This mantra is said to be the seat of divine consciousness, the sound form of Shiva that embodies his qualities. By the mere knowledge of it, a person will become a jivanmukta. It enables one to meditate upon Brahman, increases the prana, and awakens the mind—for it arises from Shiva. Being the root of all mantras, and being the form of the Primal Being, it is known as the mula [root] mantra. Because of its subtle and causal nature, and on account of its state of repose and mobility and its being indicative

of the transcendent Ishwara, it is known as the Linga (symbol). On account of its presence in all beings, at all times, and its indicating the form of Brahman, it is called the Thread [sutra] (Yogashikha Upanishad 2:5-11).

Om, the embodiment of all divine qualities (being divine itself), has the power to impart those qualities to us who invoke it. Here, too, we see that the effect of Om is not abstract or confined only to the highest levels, but it benefits—through evolution—all the aspects of our being. According to the upanishad Om increases the life force and expands the mind.

In this and all passages regarding the nature of Om the word translated “symbol” does not mean a mere sign or symbol in the usual English sense—the way the word “water” is not water but only a verbal representation for water. Rather it means indicator in the sense that Om is a form of Brahman that actually puts us in direct touch with Brahman. That is, as indicator it not only points out Brahman but attunes and joins us to Brahman, being itself Brahman.

As the gems of a necklace are held together by the string that passes through their midst, so Om is the “thread” of all existence.

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. By the repetition of the Pranava the Turiya-Turiya Brahman flashes forth in the form of the non-relative Atman (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).

Yoga Tattwa Upanishad

Sitting in a secluded place, he should repeat the Pranava for the destruction of his former sins. The mantra—the Pranava—destroys

all obstacles and all sins. By practicing thus he attains the Original State (Arambha) (Yoga Tattwa Upanishad 63, 64).

The three worlds, three Vedas, three sandhyas (morning, noon and evening), three svaras (sounds), three agnis and gunas—all these are found within Om. He who understands that which is indestructible and is the meaning of Om—by him are all these worlds attained. This [Om] is the Truth, the Supreme Seat (Yoga Tattwa Upanishad 134-136).

A Yoga Upanishad

The Turiya-Turiya, the Brahma Pranava [Om], establishes itself as the imperishable. In this substratum of the transcendent Brahman, knowers of the Vedas, intent on attaining their beatitude, seek final repose by becoming one with it (This is from one of the Yoga Upanishads, but I failed to get the reference.).

Turiya-Turiya means “the consciousness of consciousness,” the absolute substratum of reality: the Absolute. Sri Upanishadbrahmayogin comments that Pranava “establishes itself as the imperishable” by “causing the dissolution of all perceptions apart from itself which are perishable and which, though originally considered as the support of all things apart from itself, proves, on closer scrutiny, to be itself the Unsupported [Brahman].”

The Puranas

Agni Purana

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).

As already pointed out, according to the scriptural principles those

who invoke Om do supreme benefit to the entire creation through strengthening, correcting, and evolving it. In this way the Om Yogi is as the Lord himself in his form as Vishnu (Hari) the Preserver and Savior.

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. [For] the Single-Syllable [Ekakshara; Om] is the Parabrahman [Supreme God] himself (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).

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 invisible in the latter (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).

Everything but Brahman is ignorance and illusion; therefore the revelation of God in his true nature through the japa and meditation of Om is the only real knowledge. Here, too, it is being understood that Om is the Name of God and that which can reveal God to the questing soul.

The mantra [Om] should be made use of for the attainment of both earthly prosperity and final liberation of the soul (Agni

Purana 215).

I am the Self, identical with the mystic Om (Agni Purana 358).

Linga Purana

Swadhyaya [self-study] is the repetition of the Om mantra (Linga Purana 8:39).

Since one attains self-knowledge by japa and meditation of Om, that is the highest form of self-study, and is the true *atma vichara*—Self-inquiry.

Rudra [Shiva] is expressible through the single Syllable, Om, which is the divine order, the supreme cause, truth, bliss, amrita, the supreme Brahman, greater than the greatest (Linga Purana 17:63).

Om is the causal pattern of the universe as well as the power which objectifies it. Through merging our consciousness with Om we come into harmony with its aspect of divine order, and that order then manifests in our consciousness and life.

Om is amrita—that which bestows immortality.

The wise exponents of Yajus say that Om is Brahman. The Rik and Saman srutis, too, have declared similarly (Linga Purana 17:70).

That is, the Yajur, Rig, and Sama Vedas all declare: “Om is Brahman.”

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

This has two meanings. One is that the aspect of divine consciousness known as Shiva, the Auspicious One, is rooted in Om, and that those who invoke it will experience and embody that Shiva aspect of God.

The Pranava is the unchanging Atman that is all-pervasive (Linga Purana 85:43).

“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. The single-syllabled word, Om, is hidden in the cave (Linga Purana 91:49a).

Like the arrow in the target, through Om the yogi becomes centered and absorbed in Brahman. The cave is “the cave of the heart,” the center of our being. There Om is concealed as the inmost core of our consciousness. If through meditation we “hide” Om in our inner consciousness...we will find it already there!

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. The yogi who utters it attains identity with the deity (Linga Purana 91:49b).

It is said that Vishnu measured the three worlds in three divine “steps” or emanations. Om is both the spreading out of the three worlds and the three worlds themselves. As they were spread out by Om, so we can expand our consciousness and life sphere through its invocation.

To really know the Vedas—the divine knowledge contained in them rather than the mere letter—we must perfect ourselves in the practice of Om Yoga.

Om represents the three worlds. Its head is heaven; all the worlds constitute its limbs; and its feet are Brahmaloaka [the world of the Creator, Brahma] (Linga Purana 91:55).

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

Markandeya Purana

Thou art the embodiment of pure Sound. Thou art the eternal Essence of all letters and the embodiment of the three vowels [a, u, and m]. Thou art the half-vowel [bindu] beyond and its special mode of pronunciation (*Sri Devi Mahatmyam*, verses 72-74).

Om is the embodiment of the Divine Creative Power that is the Mother aspect of God.

Shiva Purana

[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 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).

Om is both the Creator and the Created, both Consciousness and Object, both spirit and creative energy—Shiva and Shakti. Material and spiritual attainment and perfection are both gained through the invocation of Om.

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).

How often do people gain some insight or understanding and then lose it after a while or else find themselves unable to manifest (establish) it in their practical life and make it truly theirs. But through the japa and meditation of Om their knowledge will be stabilized and made manifest.

[To attain] the realm (state) of Shiva], the devotee should repeat the Pranava mantra every day (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 11:36).

The world of Shiva *is* Shiva—the state of consciousness symbolically called by the name Shiva. We gain that realm of consciousness through meditation on Om.

[The yogi] shall not omit the practice of the Pranava mantra. While practicing the Pranava he shall realize fully the identity of the jiva [individual spirit] with the supreme Brahman (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwara Samhita 13:34, 35).

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).

Although God is everywhere, pervading all things, he is “stationed”—centered—in Om, which is his prime abode.

It is not enough to want something; we have to go after it and get it. Consequently we are being told that “he who aspires for salvation [liberation]” needs something more than mere aspiration. He must also be “free from aberration” to attain success of Om Yoga. The yogi cannot afford to let his mind and senses run amok in an irresponsible manner if he really wants to attain Self-realization.

Mighty as the Pranava is, the aspirant should observe the disciplines of yama-niyama as set forth in the Yoga Sutras to ensure his success in Om Yoga. Yama and Niyama are often called “the Ten Commandments of Yoga.” Each one of these Five Don’ts (Yama) and Five Do’s (Niyama) is a supporting, liberating Pillar of Yoga. The complete list is 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: continence, 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. For they are not a list of the likes and dislikes of a whimsical or dictatorial deity, but are eminently practical and pragmatic.

It should also be mentioned here that the ingestion of meat (including fish and eggs), alcohol, nicotine, and mind-altering substances—legal or not—to any degree greatly reduces the effectiveness of yoga practice. This does not mean that those who use any of these things should not or cannot practice yoga. They certainly should and

can. But they should be aware that such use will hinder their progress and make their practice more difficult than if they were free of them.

It is believed that those who die in Kashi (Benares/Varanasi) attain liberation, and that they do so by being initiated by Shiva into a mantra. Usually it is thought that the mantra given by Shiva is “Rama,” but here we see that it is actually “Om.”

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).

Om is the life force within all things, and thus is Life itself. Om Yogis live to the maximum degree.

Perfect knowledge consists of the meaning of the Pranava (Shiva Purana, Kailashasamhita 14:9).

It should be understood that “the meaning of the Pranava” is far more than intellectual conceptions, however metaphysical or abstract. The “meaning” of the Pranava is the full *realization-experience* of the nature of Om. That realization is accomplished through Om Yoga.

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

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).

This final point is very important, for the true form and nature of Om is that subtle Pranava which is only experienced through the meditation of Om. Its effect is also subtle.

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

Om is the essence of worship. Being infinite, when we offer it to God we offer him everything—including his own Self. “Among words I am the Ekakshara [Om]; among sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa” (Bhagavad Gita 10:25) The word yajna, usually translated “sacrifice,” has more the idea of offering. Japa of Om is certainly the highest offering possible, for it is God who is being offered. All other offerings seem worthless and inappropriate in comparison—unless accompanied by the invocation of Om. If we always remember Om our entire life will be an act of worship.

The Pranava means an excellent boat to cross the ocean of worldly existence [samsara]. Or Pranava may mean There is no world [rebirth] for you, or it may mean That which leads to salvation. Or it may mean That which leads to new knowledge. [All of these are plays on words—the three syllables Pra, Na, and Va being the roots of the words, or vice-versa.] 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).

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 Pranava shall be recited and repeated by those who desire all their sins annihilated (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:15).

If the devotee repeats the Pranava he becomes pure (Shiva

Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:18).

By repeating the Pranava daily the devotee becomes perpetually pure. Thereafter the repetition of the mantra is conducive to the achievement of desires.

A devotee who [through the] repetitions of the Pranava is thus fully enlightened shall master Shuddha Yoga. A person who has thus mastered Shuddha Yoga becomes certainly a liberated living soul [jivanmukta]. A mahayogi who performs japa and bhavanam perpetually of Shiva in the form of the Pranava, certainly becomes Shiva himself. The devotee who practices the japa of Pranava becomes a sage (Shiva Purana, Vidyeshwarasamhita 17:22-26).

Om Yoga is here referred to as Shuddha (Pure) Yoga—the Yoga of Purification—because it purifies the yogi from the impurities of ignorance and karmic bonds, setting him free into the real of Pure Spirit—Shuddha Atma.

[In the beginning] there manifested the single-syllabled Brahman as the word Om. It expressed Brahman (Shiva Purana, Vayaviyasamhita 35:1).

The unmanifest Pranava was transmuted into the Veda (Shiva Purana, Vayaviyasamhita 35:6).

Whatever object there is, whether compounded or separated, is indicated by the Pranava. Therefore, this single-syllabled Brahman is the expression of all meanings. Therefore at the outset Shiva creates the universe, saying Om. Shiva is the Pranava and the Pranava is Shiva. That is because there is no difference between that which is named and the name [the designated and the designator]. Rudra is that which is expressed by the single-syllabled Om.... Thus they call me Om (Shiva Purana, Vayaviyasamhita 35:42-46, 53).

Repetition of Om is known as rising to Shiva's world [loka].

Japa of Om purifies the mind. At the time of meditation the japa of Om should be mental (Unfortunately, the reference was not noted for this.).

Srimad Bhagavatam Mahapurana

The Holy Lord said: Seated on a seat of moderate height with his body erect in a comfortable posture, placing both his hands on his lap and steadying his gaze on the tip of his nose, and having fully controlled his senses, he should manifest in his mind the sound of the Pranava—continuous as the ringing of a bell—as extending uninterruptedly, fine as a fiber of a lotus stalk (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.14.32-34).

The idea is that the meditator should intone Om continually, relaxing his awareness into the inner sound that should become increasingly subtle, “fine as a fiber of a lotus stalk.”

I am the Pranava (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.16.11).

In the beginning [in the Satya Yuga] the Pranava alone formed the Veda (Srimad Bhagavatam).

In Indian reckoning a Yuga is an Age—one of the divisions of evolutionary time. There are four Yugas, known as Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and 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.).

According to this and other scriptures, the Vedas were not utilized in the Satya—the highest age or Yuga—but were only given to the world in the Treta Yuga. So Vedic Dharma is not really based on the Vedas but on Om—of which they are considered to be a later evolute. The Vedas were the earliest formal scriptures, that is true, but according to this

passage from the Srimad Bhagavatam they were revealed to the Rishis only many thousands of years after the appearance of the first human beings.

Vayu Purana

The yogi who is filled with Omkara becomes imperishable in the Imperishable Being. The Omkara is the bow. The Atman is the arrow. Brahman is its target. It should be hit unerringly. Like the arrow, the Atman shall be wholly absorbed in Brahman. The single-syllabled Om is Brahman hidden in the cavity of the heart. This Om is the set of the three Vedas, three worlds, three fires, three steps of Vishnu and the Rik, Saman, and Yajur mantras.... The Omkara is a set of three worlds. Its head is the heaven. It is the entire universe. It is the region of Brahma.

The intelligent yogi who engages in meditation attains the knowledge of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and the Upanishadic lore through his yogic knowledge. Thus with all his elements dissolved, he becomes elementless. He then transmigrates to the eternal region whence there is no return.... The Brahmanas who know the Omkara are never born again. He who understands properly and again meditates upon the imperishable supreme Brahman called Omkara leaves off the cycle of worldly existence. He becomes liberated from all ties and bondages. Undoubtedly he attains the auspicious eternal region devoid of attributes.

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 [through meditation].

The Lord created everything at the opportune time with Omkara all round..

These are the secrets of the ascetics in due order. He who understands meditation attains the highest region (Vayu Purana I.20.4-6, 10, 24, 25, 27-30, 33, 35).

Other Scriptures

Aitareya Brahmana

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

Bhagavad Gita

I am the Pranava (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 (9:17).

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

The Mahabharata

The Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata, so the verses cited in that section may be considered as from the Mahabharata as well. The following comes from a section of the Mahabharata known as the Anugita.

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).

Mantra Yoga Samhita

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:

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).

Manu Smriti

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).

The threefold knowledge may be interpreted as being knowledge of body, mind, and spirit, knowledge of the physical, astral, and causal worlds, knowledge of the threefold Vedas, or knowledge of the Three Eternals: God, Creation, and Souls. Whichever it might be, it is certain that Manu is saying that Om is the basis of such knowledge. In other places we have already seen that to know Om is to know the Veda.

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).

Omkara Pranam Mantra

The Yogis always meditate upon Omkara. This Omkara is the bestower of all desires and salvation. We bow down to the Supreme Omkara (Quoted in *Meditation on Om* by Swami Sivananda.).

Omkara Smarana Stotra

1) The Supreme Brahman is attained by the devoted contemplation, hearing, japa, and sankirtan [singing] of Om at all times.

2) By the mere thought [smaran, remembrance] of Om one attains the highest Brahma Jnana [Knowledge of God], the state of final Liberation and Immortality.

3) He who meditates on the Pranava in a continuous stream of thought like that of oil poured from one vessel to another or the continuous sound [resonance] of a bell, such a man should be considered as the knower of the Vedas.

4) By the long repetition of Om the knower of the Supreme Reality, whose refuge is solitude, overcomes the wandering of the mind due to the taint in the intellect.

5) Concentrating on the origin of the nose (the top of the bridge of the nose) with hands and feet controlled, the mind withdrawn from all activities, one should meditate on Omkara, the Pranava.

6) By the meditation on the monosyllable Om, Vishnu attains the status of Vishnu; Brahma attains Brahmanhood and Shiva becomes Shiva (Quoted in *Meditation on Om* by Swami Sivananda.).

Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva are not three gods, but aspects (rays or principles) of the one God. Being made in the image of God, these three are also in us in a microcosmic manner, and we manifest or attain those states by japa and meditation of Om. Some interpret this to mean that there are great cosmic beings of incomprehensible levels of evolution that became what they are through meditation on Om. Whichever it is, the message is the same: meditation on Om is the way to divinity.

The Ribhu Gita

The Syllable Om is the Self (Ribhu Gita 10:22).

Brahman is all as Omkara. Brahman itself is of the nature of Omkara (Ribhu Gita 17:40).

Brahman is just one Syllable: Om. The Imperishable is just one Syllable: Om (Ribhu Gita 24:21).

The bhavana [meditation] of Omkara is the japa that gives happiness (Ribhu Gita 34:8).

The Shiva Samhita

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).

Let the yogi destroy the multitude of karmas by the Pranava [Om].

Vishnu Smriti

Let him repeat the sacred Syllable Om (Vishnu Smriti 30:33).

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 recitation of Om aloud is ten times better than the sacrifices prescribed [by the Veda]; it is a hundred times better when repeated in a soft voice; it is a thousand times better when repeated mentally. The Four Daily Sacrifices, 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. One who is benevolent towards all creatures is justly called

a Brahmin (Vishnu Smriti 55:17-21. This text is also known as the Vaishnava Dharmashastra or the Vishnu Sutra.)

The identical passage is to be found in the second section of the Manu Smriti, but since this is a better translation I am giving it and commenting on it here.

All religious (dharmic) acts are said to perish because the positive karma engendered by them can be used up like a deposit in the bank. Also, the right times for them to be done can pass or the elements needed for them can become unavailable. Since Om is imperishable, so is the positive force produced by its invocation. Being infinite, its effect is also infinite. Being divine, it bestows Divinity. Powerful as the Vedic rites certainly are, mental repetition of Om is a thousand times more powerful. Moreover, the essential Four Daily Sacrifices, consisting of offerings to God, sages, human beings, and animals, as well as all other rites prescribed in the Vedas, when combined produce but a small percentage of the effect of the japa and meditation of Om, which produce the effect of all those sacred rites together—and vastly more, for liberation (moksha) itself will be attained by the yogi who meditates upon Om throughout his life.

In this quotation we see that Brahminhood is a matter of spiritual character and not birth. And that quality which marks out a Brahmin is benevolence towards all creatures. We have already seen in preceding sections that japa and meditation of Om are declared to benefit all creatures as well as the creation. So the Om Yogi is beyond doubt a Brahmin of the highest order.

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

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 of the *Yoga Sutras*.] Being unconditioned by time he is teacher even of the ancients. His designator [vachaka—spoken form] is the Pranava

[Om]. [“His manifesting word is Om”—Swami Vivekananda’s translation of the *Yoga Sutras*.] its japa [constant repetition] and bhavanam [meditation] 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* 1:24-32).

The latter part about obstacles and their removal by Om is found virtually verbatim in the Varaha and Yoga Tattwa (B) Upanishads.

Yoga Vashishtha

The Cosmic Spirit utters Om and by pure will creates the various objects (*Yoga Vashishtha* 3:67).

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 with the experience of its meaning, when the consciousness reaches the deep sleep state (*Yoga Vashishtha* 5:78).

I abandon all thoughts and notions; contemplating Om, I shall remain in the Self, in total inner silence (*Yoga Vashishtha* 5:81).

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).

My heart is established in the peace indicated by the resonance of Om (Yoga Vashishtha 5:87).

Brahman is the Truth that is indicated as Om (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:30).

[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).

He should repeat Om till the mind gains perfect peace (Yoga Vashishtha 6:1:128).

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).

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

SECTION TWO: THE MASTERS OF WISDOM ON OM

Swami Abhedananda

It [Om] is all-pervasive and complete. When we learn this and 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....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....

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. Our mind will be concentrated, and we shall come in direct communion with the cosmic Being. All the revelations and inspirations will come, and we get the most wonderful results by the repetition of the Syllable (Swami Abhedananda, *Yoga Psychology*, Chapter Sixteen, "Mystic Word and God Consciousness").

Anandamayi Ma

From the Pranava you will get illumination of the atma. Om and atma are closely connected.

[Remembrance of the Pranava] must become so automatic that you cannot breathe without remembering it.

Om is the root of all sounds. Every other sound is contained in that, and it is used to take one beyond all sound.

(These selections from the spiritual counsels of Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi are taken from the diaries of Brahmacharini Atmananda as reproduced in *Death Must Die* by Ram Alexander.).

Thou hast come out of the Pranava, the seed-word and base of all existence and the truth of all.... The Primal Cause is indicated in the Vedas by the Pranava.

This is from a Sanskrit hymn that emanated spontaneously from Sri Ma's lips in 1930. It also contains the expression: "Thou hast come out of me," implying that it is directed to the Divine as revealed to the yogi. Hence "Thou hast come out of the Pranava" indicates that the vision of God—indeed God himself—emerges from the Pranava to the inner eye of the yogi. Here, too, we see that Om is the seed power and the foundation of all existence—being Divinity Itself. Further, Om is "the truth of all"—the sole reality within all things as well as that which reveals that inmost reality.

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 (From the Chapter entitled "Thought Power" in *Matri Darshan* by J.C. Roy.).

The entire evolving cosmos is Om itself evolving itself.

Anonymous Commentator on Shankara

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.

Alice Bailey

The Sacred Word: This is the Word of Glory, the Om. This is the Pranava, the sound of conscious Life itself as it is breathed forth into all forms.... The Pranava, when rightly expressed, demonstrates the Father or Spirit through the medium of the soul. It is the Word of the incarnated sons of God.... This [is the] secret of secrets, and this [is the] great mystery of the ages. All that can be done is to collate certain facts about Om, and leave the student to extend the concept and grasp the significance of the brief statements made according to the state of his intuition.

The following statements about the Sacred Word can therefore be made and should be studied with care:

1. Om is the Word of Glory, and is the Christ in us, the hope of glory [Colossians 1:27].
2. The Word when rightly apprehended causes the second, or Christ aspect of divinity to shine forth resplendently.
3. It is the sound which brings into manifestation the incarnated soul (macrocosmic or microcosmic), the ego, the Christ, and causes the "radiant Augoeides" to be seen on earth.
4. It is the Word which is the releaser of consciousness and when correctly understood and used, releases the soul from the limitations of form in the three worlds.
5. Om is the synthesizer of the three aspects and therefore is primarily the Word of the human kingdom in which the three lines of divine life meet—spirit, soul and body.

6. It is also the Word...to reveal in a newer and fuller way the nature of the inner Identity, of the soul within the form, the son of mind, the solar angel, the fifth principle.

7. The significance of the Word only becomes apparent after the “light within” is realized. By its use the “spark” becomes a radiant light, the light becomes a flame, and the flame eventually becomes a sun. By its use the “sun of righteousness arises” [Malachi 4:2] in the life of every man.

8. Each of the three letters [A, U, and M] has relation to the three aspects, and each can be applied to any of the known triplicities.

9. The Master, the God within, is indeed the Word, Om, and of this Master (found at the heart of all beings) it is true that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God (thus duality) and the Word was God” [John 1:1]. Through its use man arrives at a realization of:

- a. His own essential divinity,
- b. The purpose of the form-taking process,
- c. The constitution and nature of those forms,
- d. The reality of consciousness, or the relation of the divine

Self or spirit to the form, its polar opposite. This relation, in its evolutionary working out, we call consciousness.

Swami Bhaktivedanta

If you are a serious student of Vedic mantras, you will chant Om because Vedic mantras begin with Om. Om, or the Omkara, is Krishna. Many people are fond of chanting Omkara. That is also nice, because Omkara is Krishna. If we simply remember, “This Omkara is Krishna,” then we become perfect, because the goal is to become Krishna conscious. So you can become Krishna conscious while chanting Om (“The Taste of Krishna,” Back to Godhead, Sept/Oct 1997, p. 9).

In the Vedas, the chief transcendental vibration, Omkara, is also Krishna. Pranava Omkara is the divine substance of the

Vedas. Following the Vedas means chanting the Vedic mantras, and no Vedic mantra is complete without Omkara. In the Mandukya Upanishad, Omkara is stated to be the most auspicious sound representation of the Supreme Lord. This is also confirmed again in the Atharva Veda. Omkara is the sound representation of the Supreme Lord and is therefore the principle word in the Vedas. In this connection, the Supreme Lord, Krishna, says, *Pranava sarva-vedasu*: “I am the Syllable Om in the all Vedic mantras” [Bhagavad Gita 7:8]....

The goal of Vedantic study, therefore, is to know the Supreme Lord Krishna. This point is stressed in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Eight, verse 13, where it is stated that by the mystic yoga process, ultimately vibrating the sacred Syllable Om, one attains to his supreme spiritual planet. In the Vedanta Sutras, which you have certainly read, the Fourth Chapter, adhikarana 4, sutra 22, states positively, *anavrittih shabdai*: “By sound vibration one becomes liberated” (*The Science of Self-Realization*, pp. 105, 106).

Bharat Giri Maharaj

Q: Is the Pranava the King of Mantras?

A: Yes. Everything in the universe comes out of Om and goes back into Om.... Om is God’s First, Middle, and Last Names.

All yogis meditate on the Bindu of Om. [Here he lifted his hand as if indicating the dot that is made at the top of Omkara when it is written as ॐ.] The Bindu means that Om goes on forever. All mantras come out of Om. No mantra exists without Om.

The bindu of Om is the increasingly subtler sound that we experience in meditation, that arises eternally from the depths of God and of us.

Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati

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 (*Satyartha Prakash*).

This is an extremely important point: all “names” of God are really descriptive titles, and essentially do not designate God in a “proper” or exclusive manner as they all have meanings of their own, such as almighty, universal, and such like. Om, on the other hand, has no intellectual meaning or designation at all, but is a direct name or indicator of God.

Gaudapada

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

No mantra should be utilized in meditation or japa but Om, for it is the source of all and the means to attain all.

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 (*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*).

**Gorakhnath [Gorakshanath]
(Greatest of the Nath Yogis).**

That supreme light, Om, is (that) in whose elements the worlds bhuh, bhavah and svah [the three lower worlds] and the divinities moon, sun and fire exist.

In which the three times [past, present and future], the three Vedas, the three worlds [physical, astral and causal], the three [Vedic] accents, and the three gods [Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva] are situated, that, Om, is the supreme light.

In which action and desire and knowledge, Brahmni, Raudri, and Vaisnavi, the threefold Shakti [of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu, is contained, that, Om, is the supreme light.

That Om, in which these three letters A, and likewise U and M, which has the bindu as its mark, exist, is the supreme light.

With the voice one should repeat that bija; one should practice it with the body; with the mind one should remember: That, 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 84-89).

Mahamahopadyaya Sri Gopinath Kaviraj

The mystic Pranava is the essence of revealed literature and of human sciences, and is the creator of the world, the fount of all vidyas and mantras, and the matrix of all names and forms (*Aspects of Indian Thought*, pp. 17, 18).

Jnana Shakti [the power of knowledge] is the faculty by which God as well as the liberated souls eternally enjoy the infinite joy of their beatified nature and which is indeed no other than the Shabda Brahman or Pranava (*Aspects of Indian Thought*, p. 29).

In a footnote he adds: "Srikanta in the plainest language asserts the identity of Uma or the Supreme Power of Divine Knowledge with the mystic Omkara" (Srikanta was a leading commentary on the Brahma Sutras.).

In its essence the Veda is equivalent to the Pranava (*Aspects of Indian Thought*, p. 31).

Kabir

(Kabir was a great poet-saint of Northern India in the fifteenth century. These quotations are taken from *Songs of Kabir*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore.).

All things are created by Om (II. 75).

From the word Om the Creation sprang (III.76).

This is the Ultimate Word: but can any express its marvellous savor? He who has savored it once, he knows what joy it can give. Kabir says: Knowing it, the ignorant man becomes wise, and the wise man becomes speechless and silent (II.61).

Kabir says: Listen to the Word, the Truth, which is your essence. He speaks the Word to himself; and he himself is the Creator (I.98).

**Receive that Word from which the universe springeth!
That word is the Guru; I have heard it, and become the disciple.
How many are there who know the meaning of that word?**

**O Sadhu! practice that Word!
The Vedas and the Puranas proclaim it,
The world is established in it,
The Rishis and devotees speak of it:
But none knows the mystery of the Word.
The householder leaves his house when he hears it,
The ascetic comes back to love when he hears it,
The Six Philosophies expound it,
The Spirit of Renunciation points to that Word,**

**From that Word the world-form has sprung,
That Word reveals all.**

Kabir says: But who knows whence the Word cometh? (1.66).
(Only he who unites himself with it in meditation.).

Lalla Yogeshwari

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 Vakyaani 33).

This covers a tremendous amount of ground in a very few words: the sahasrara as the natural abode of the Self which is divine, and the dispelling of ignorance and the arising of Self-knowledge through Om joined to the breath—which flows upward into the sahasrara throughout meditation and the japa of Om outside meditation.

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 Vakyaani 34).

In this way she affirms the necessity of the rising of Om and the breath into the thousand-petalled lotus of the head, 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.

With the help of the Pranava Lalla absorbed herself in union with the Light of the Self [Atma Jyoti], and so expelled the fear of death (Lalla Vakyaani 76).

When by the concentration of my thoughts I established the

Pranava within, I made my body like a blazing coal. The six paths I traversed and gained the seventh, and then did I Lalla, reach the place of illumination (Lalla Vakanyi 82).

Through Om even the physical body is transmuted by the divine fire of tapasya. Traversing the six levels of consciousness embodied in the six lower chakras, at last Om brings the yogi to the seventh level of perfect illumination.

I locked the doors and windows of my body. I seized 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 Vakanyi 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.

By means of the mystic Syllable Om Lalla merged in her Cit-Jyoti, the luminous light of pure Consciousness; and thus dispelled the fear of death (Lalla Vakanyi 102).

In Vak 122 Lalla defines God as: **he who is the ever-unobstructed sound of Om.**

**Minanath
(Founder of the Nath Yogi Sampradaya).**

The letter *a* is Brahma, *u* is Vishnu, *m* is Shiva, it is said. Clearly (this Om) is the lord of supreme peace, the ultimate one (Yogavishaya 18).

Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak, the first guru of the Sikh religion (which during his lifetime was considered a part of Hinduism), began his great work, the

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which became the holy scripture of the Sikhs, with these words: **The One Omkar is the True Name [of God].**

The use of the word (actually number) “one”—*ek*—had two purposes. One was to emphasize that God is absolutely One, that Om expresses this Perfect Unity. The other was to underline that Om is positively the only true (*sat*) Name (*nam*) of God, all others being descriptive titles.

(A Sikh commentator has this to say: “In Hindu mythology the word ‘Om’ always meant [stood] for God as monotheistic. Then they started interpreting it as more than one God. Guru Nanak put an integer ‘1’ before it and a kar (a semi-circle) after it. Thus it becomes ‘Ek-Om-Kar’ and by doing so, he sealed the position for ever meaning ‘There is One and only One God.’ Therefore Guru Granth Sahib uniquely begins with integer One (‘1’). The One Absolute is the monotheistic conception of God and is represented by numerical symbol here. One God does not only mean numerically one but Unique without a second like him.”).

By the time of Nanak many Sanskrit title-names were attributed to God. Some teachers said that only one of these many—the one favored by their school of thought—was the real Name of God, while others said that they were all of equal validity and effect in calling upon God. But Nanak held that only Om was the “proper” Name of God, for it had no secondary meaning as did the others—for example, Krishna means “the Dark One,” Shiva means “the Auspicious One,” Durga means “Hard to Attain,” and so on throughout tens of thousands of names. Om, in contrast has no meaning whatsoever but is a mantric designation of the Absolute, Satchidananda Brahman.

Further, at the time of Guru Nanak there were those who spoke of “the long Omkar” and “the short Omkar,” meaning that the various mantras were extensions of Om and therefore extended or “long” Omkars in contrast to the single syllable Om, the “short” Omkar. Guru Nanak absolutely denied this rationalization for departing from the Vedic tradition, and said that there was only one Omkar: Om itself. Finally, by stating there is only one Omkar, Guru Nanak points out that the only correct practice is the repetition of Om in its simple form.

After stating that Om is the only true Name of God, Guru Nanak

continues to describe it as: “Creative Being personified; without fear; without hatred; Image of the Deathless; beyond birth; self-existent; the Guru’s grace.” Om is all this, for Om is Divinity Itself. The final description is most important: “Guru’s grace.” The word guru is two syllables: *gu*, “darkness”, and *ru*, “that which removes.” Guru, then, means the Remover of Darkness, and is a Name of God, the Light whose advent removes all darkness whatsoever. A human may be an *acharya*, a teacher, but only God can be a *guru* in the highest sense. God in essence is transcendent, silent, and unmoving; yet he has manifested as Om by which all souls (jivas) are drawn back into union with God. Thus Om is the Grace of God and is Itself the Guru.

But Om is not to be respected passively, merely acknowledged and honored. Therefore Nanak then says: “Repeat That which was True [Existent, Real] in the Primal Beginning, True throughout the ages, True here and now—forever and ever True.” Om is all this, as well. It is the *japa* and meditation of Om that Nanak urges us to do.

In sum Guru Nanak wrote: “The Word is the Guru, The Guru is the Word; within the Word immortality is found.”

Avadhuta Nityananda Paramhansa

(The numbers following the quotations are the numbers assigned to them in *The Chidakasha Gita*.)

When the mind is merged in Bindu and Nada [of Om], nirvikalpa samadhi is attained. Our attention is then entirely towards ananda (59).

Om—the tower of peace! Om—the form of peace! Om! Salutation to Omkar! (80).

Omkar is one without a second. Omkar is the cause of both creation and dissolution. Omkar destroys manas [the lower mind of the senses and the ego]. Omkar is really the Atman in you. Omkar is indivisible (109).

Omkar is the light of consciousness (110).

Shiva who dwells in the heart-space is the One, everlasting. Shiva is Omkar. Omkar is Pranava. When united with forms, it is Pranava. Omkar is the “unawareness” of bodily existence (121).

Omkar is the most awesome of all forms (122).

One is the dwelling; one is the eternal dwelling (mukti); that dwelling is Omkar (130).

Realization of Omkar is the annihilation of the world. Realization of Omkar is the destruction of the manas (133).

All is he, pervading everything. He is the One, pervading all creatures; qualitless; the one Omkar; one, whose form is everlasting peace; blesser of those who have faith in him (172).

He [the Lord] is the Omkar, Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara, the origin—Para-Brahma (188).

All things with form is Omkar. Omkar is the divine in them. What is Omkar is the subtle Bindu. Omkar pervades both in and out (189).

A Raja Yogi mahatma is all pervasive Omkar, all pervasive Pranava (194).

The form of God is peace. Om and peace are his forms (208).

Om is without beginning or ending. Omkar is like a stage manager in a drama. As it works through the bodies of men, those bodies are pervaded by Omkar. This Syllable is inside us, outside us and everywhere. It is the cause of everything that exists.

That sound exists in everything. This energy is not divisible but indivisible. What is called Pranava is another name for Omkar. When it is united with prana and moves in the body, it is called “Pranava.” When the nature and the subtle [i.e., physical and non-physical], sthula [gross] and sukshma [subtle], are separate, it is Pranava. When we feel both to be one, then it is called the feeling of oneness. This is identical with “Omkar.” At that time, one sees the One everywhere. That which you worship with faith, becomes ALL (259).

That energy called “Omkar” pervades the universe and is formless. It is the light in ALL and the light of ALL (260).

The giver of peace, the Lord of the universe, is the Omkar. Let his bhakti become unwavering in that Giver of Peace. This is real bhakti. This is eternal peace. This is the self-luminous. This is what is called Sat. It is Om the Great, the Movable and the Seen, Om the Essence. It is what is declared by the sages as “The Truth.” Om, Om (286).

All penetrating Omkar is the all penetrating Pranava (194).

Shiva-Shakti is one indivisible. Shiva-Shakti is salvation. It is the Omkar; it is the Pranava. From Pranava is creation. Pranava is consciousness of the body, Omkar is soul consciousness (211).

Where the sound of Omkar is experienced, there is no ignorance (231).

Why is man called man [manusha]? Because he has manas [mind]. The mind must become one with Omkar (270).

Kundalini in the form of Omkar is in the subtle nadis. Let this “subtle” [Om] be known by experience (273).

In the Omkar, let the pure chitta be firmly fixed, following the path of subtle buddhi (284).

The energy of Omkar is like a mine of water. It moves in all directions. It pervades both inside us and outside us in the form of reason. It becomes vibrationless, creating, maintaining, and destroying all. The vibrationlessness becomes one with reason. Reason becomes merged in Omkar. Omkar becomes one with reason. Omkar becomes one with the world. The world becomes one with Omkar. The Omkar and the world become one with akasha. Akasha becomes one with reason. Reason becomes one with akasha. Reason and akasha become one with Omkar (285).

Swami Premeshananda

Can't you fix your mind on the Syllable Om? It will be good if you can do so. The creation of the universe has come from the sound Om. If one repeats the Syllable Om, one can have the vision of God (*Go Forward*, p. 233).

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 (*Go Forward*, pp. 245, 246).

The first word signifying God that was revealed to mankind was Om. On concentrating one's mind on the word Om, the mind soars above the world and one can feel God, who is the Cause of the world.

According to [Patanjali], a person can attain samadhi even by reflecting on God, who is omniscient, omnipotent, ever free and the supreme Teacher of man. To reflect on him, one has to repeat

Om while remembering that Purusha is one. If one does this for a long time, one becomes aware of the jivatman (the individual Self),... As a result, for such a person no further obstacle remains in the path of progress towards nirvana (complete emancipation).

Swami Rama Tirtha

An American devotee of Swami Rama Tirtha, Mrs. Wellman, wrote: "He was ever filled with bliss and peace and was constantly humming 'Om' when not employed in talking, writing or reading." His biographer, Puran Singh, recorded: "The effect of his presence was marvellous, his joy was infectious, and his ideas still more so, and above all his recitation of 'Om.' Every religious seeker who came to him, began reciting 'Om.'"

Before his lectures Swami Rama Tirtha would have the audience engage in chanting Om with him for quite some time and throughout the discourse themselves he would frequently intone Om. His conversations, too, were punctuated through with chanting of Om.

His life came to an end when he fell into the Ganges. Realizing that he was too weak from a previous illness to extricate himself from the powerful current, he began intoning Om and disappeared beneath the water. A week later his undecayed body was discovered floating on the Ganges, sitting upright in meditation posture with his mouth forming the Syllable Om. By the Immortal Name he had become immortal. ["By the immortal Name one becomes immortal." Jabala Upanishad 3]

Puran Singh further wrote: "He insisted at times in very emphatic language on the ceaseless repetition of 'Om.'...I never saw him excuse himself from this incessant labor. "Om," he used to say, 'is the divine punctuation of life, without it, one cannot breathe the divine breath. Without it one dies.'"

While living in the Himalayas he wrote: "Throw away all books into the Ganges and chant 'Om' with every breath."

In India, in Japan, and in America, Om was his constant companion and was considered the source of many miracles that occurred to and around him. While at Lucknow he would ask those present at dawn to

join with him in chanting Om while facing the rising sun in salutation. (Usually the Gayatri mantra is recited at this time, so it is interesting that Rama Tirtha only chanted Om. Sri Ramakrishna had previously said that all the mantras recited at dawn in the ritual known as the Sandhya could be replaced by the Gayatri alone, and that in time the Gayatri would be replaced by Om.).

Sit still, chant Om and then think who is within you.... All the Vedanta, nay all the philosophy of the Hindus is simply an exposition of this Syllable Om. Om has a charm about it, an efficiency, a virtue in it which directly brings all feelings and all thoughts into a state of harmony, brings peace and rest to the soul and puts the mind in a state where it is one with God....Science may not be able to explain this, but this is a fact which can be verified by experiment. Woe unto science if it goes against the truth connected with the efficiency of the sacred Syllable Om....The real Self which is knowledge absolute and power absolute is the only stern Reality, before which the apparent reality of the world melts away! Om is the name of this Reality.

Realize it [Om] and sing it in the language of feeling, sing it with your acts, sing it through every power of your body. Let it course through your veins, let it pulsate in your bosom, let every part of your body and every drop of your blood tingle with the truth that you are...the true Self!...A man who sings Om in all these ways, chants it with his lips, feels it with his heart and sings it through action, makes his life a continuous song....But if you cannot chant it with feeling nor chant it with your acts, do not give up, go on chanting it with your lips. Even that is not without use....But chanting it through feelings and actions would naturally follow if you commence humming it with the mouth.

Commenting on the depiction of Krishna playing a flute, Swami Rama Tirtha wrote:

One should bring out from the flute of the mind the sacred

Syllable Om, which removes all evils.

Before falling asleep, and after waking, firmly resolve to follow the Vedantic discipline. Keep chanting Om.

(These quotations are from *Life, Teachings and Writings of Swami Rama Tirtha* by Prem Lata).

The literal meaning of Vedanta is the end of knowledge, the end of speech, a point where all speech, all thought stops and for the Hindus the whole of Vedanta is represented by Om (From the introductory pages of volume two of *In Woods of God Realization*, the collection of Swami Rama Tirtha's works.).

Chant Om, Om. If you do that for a few moments, your whole being from head to foot becomes Light. Why pray for Light when Light is your own Self? You become Light immediately (Lecture: "The Path of Truth").

It is this "I Am" that is represented by Om. The pure "I am," "I am He," is represented by Om (Lecture: "God Within").

How to make the mind rise higher into the celestial regions—to make the soul soar away up to the throne of God! When the benign light of the rising or setting sun is falling upon the translucent lids of half-closed eyes, we begin humming the Syllable Om, we sing it in the language of feeling (Lecture: "The Way to Self-Realization").

"There is but one reality," this name Om, which is the Holy of Holies, this name Om possessing the highest powers of Divinity or God, should be chanted (Lecture: "Aids to Realization").

If [you are] distracted by worldly desires, you are not singing Om (Lecture: "Pranayama and Will Power").

This Atman, this true ocean of Reality, this controlling and governing Self is to be realized, to be felt, to be seen and known in order to be one with the Infinite. This true Self or Atman is called the “*I am.*” This true Self, the perfect “*I*” is beyond cause, time and space. This perfect true Self is represented by Om. Om means “*I am;*” and while chanting Om you have not to address yourself to somebody else. While chanting Om, think not of someone outside yourself whom you are calling. While chanting Om, you must feel your Self to be one with this true “*I am.*” By this strong feeling, the mind is merged in the Reality. By this strong belief, by this living knowledge of the mind, the mind becomes, as it were, a bubble which bursts into the mighty ocean of Reality. This is the way to Realization; this strong feeling, this living knowledge on the part of the mind laying hold of you, and dehypnotizing your false self, is the way to gain Truth, to free yourself (Lecture: “Class Lectures on Vedanta–III”).

Now Rama shall tell you the method which the sages of India adopted to acquire God-vision....[In] the Hindu Scriptures, it is stated that all the Vedas are like a tree which sprang from the seed known as Om. This is called the seed from which the tree of the Vedas sprang....Those people who want to get a higher inspiration, those people who want to acquire that God-vision, who want to rise above the egoistic, personal, little, limited, local consciousness of self, they get the inspiration and light through the chant of Om! Om! Om!

Now it is not the mere chant by the throat, it is something else also. While the lips and the throat chant physically, the mind chants it intellectually, and the heart chants it in a language of higher emotions. Thus the threefold chant of this sacred Syllable Om brings you to that unison and oneness with the All, the Light. This was the method they adopted....

The life in your breath is Om. The sound which is the soul of your breath is Om. This is then the most natural name for the Heaven within, the God, Supreme Spirit, that enlightens all spirits

and all souls; the Soul of all souls, the Life of all lives is Om....

So Rama says that intonation is connected with the chant of Om and experience has proved that it has a marvellous effect in bringing your soul at one with the soul of the ALL. It has a marvellous effect. If Science cannot prove it today, let it grow, and a little later it will be able to explain it. In the meantime the fact will remain a fact. So on the basis of this experience of the sages, Rama means personal experiences, Rama lays before you this, the treasure of the Vedic philosophy. Thus it is that the Hindus reached the higher vision of clairvoyance, of the inner, spiritual light (Lecture: "The Ancient Spiritualism of India").

In India there is a beautiful story in the Puranas. It speaks of Krishna jumping into the river Yamuna while his father, mother, friends and relatives stood by struck dumb with amazement. In their very presence he jumped into the torrent. They thought that he was gone, that he would never rise again. The story says that he went to the bottom of the river and there was a thousand-headed dragon. Krishna began to blow his flute, he began to play the mantram Om, he began to kick down the heads of the dragon, he began to crush down the heads of the dragon one by one, but as he crushed the many heads of the dragon one by one, other heads sprang up and thus it was very hard for him. Krishna went on jumping and dancing upon the crested head of the dragon; he went on playing the mantram on his flute, he went on chanting his mantram and still jumping and crushing down the heads of the dragon. In half an hour the dragon was dead; what with the charming note of the flute and what with the crushing of the dragon by his heels, the dragon was dead. The waters of the river were turned into blood and the blood of the dragon mixed with the water of the river. All the wives of the dragon came up to pay homage to Krishna, they wanted to drink of the nectar of his sweet presence. Krishna came up from the river, the amazed relatives and friends were beside themselves, their joy knew no bounds, so happy were they to find their beloved Krishna, their beloved one in their midst again. This story has a

double meaning. It is an object lesson, so to say, for those who want to gain an insight of Reality, into their own Divinity.

That lake or river represents the mind or rather the lake of the mind, and whoever wants to become Krishna (the word Krishna means or stands for Deity, God), whoever wants to regain the paradise lost, he has to enter deep into the lake of his own mind, to dive deep into himself, he has to plunge deep into his own nature. Reaching the bottom he has to fight the venomous dragon, the poisonous snake of passion, desire, the venomous dragon of the worldly mind. He has to crush it down, he has to destroy its crests, he has to kick down its many heads, he has to charm and destroy it. He must make clear the lake of his mind, he must clear his mind this way. The process is the same as that followed by Krishna. He is to take up his flute and play the mantram Om through it. He has to sing that divine, that blessed song through it....In this state of mind, in this peace of heart, with such a pure soul begin to chant the mantram Om, begin to sing the sacred Syllable Om. This is putting the breath of music into the flute. Make your whole life a flute. Make your whole body a flute. Empty it of selfishness and fill it with the divine breath. Chant Om and while doing it, begin that search within the lake of your mind. Search out the poisonous snake with its many tongues. These heads, tongues and fangs of the poisonous snake are the innumerable wants, the worldly tendencies and the selfish propensities. Crush them one by one, trample them under your feet, single them out, overcome them and destroy them while singing the Syllable Om.

Build up a character, make firm resolutions, make strong determinations and take solemn vows so that when you come out of the lake or river of the mind, you may not find the waters poisoned; so that the waters will not poison those who drink from them. Come out of the lake having purified it altogether. Let people differ from you, let them subject you to all sorts of difficulties, let them revile you, but despite their favors and frowns, their threats and promises, from the lake of your mind there should flow nothing but divine, infinitely pure, fresh water. Nectar should flow out of you so that

it may become as impossible for you to think evil as for the pure fresh spring to poison those who drink from it. Purify the heart, sing the Syllable Om, pick out all points of weakness and eradicate them. Come out victorious having formed a beautiful character. When the dragon of passion is destroyed, you will find the objects of desire worshipping you just as the wives of the dragon under the river paid homage unto Krishna after he had killed the snake (Lecture: "The Spiritual Law of Character").

This sacred Syllable Om is the end of knowledge in all the world. It is all the Vedas, all the Kingdom of Heaven....In order to come by the Treasures within or in order that the Kingdom of Heaven may be unlocked, Om is the key to be used....This is the seed of all knowledge. Om is the reality which runs through your breath. It is present in all breath of the world, it is the most natural name of the Power which is at the back of all differences, all divisions, all separateness, the most natural name for the Reality....All Vedanta, nay, all the philosophy of the Hindus is simply an exposition of this Syllable Om. Om covers the whole universe. There is not a law, not a force in the whole world, not an object in all the world which is not comprised by the Syllable Om. One by one you will see that all the planes of being, all the worlds, all phases of existence are covered by this Syllable A-U-M-Om....Om has a charm about it, an efficacy, a virtue in it which directly brings the mind of one who chants it under control, which directly brings all feeling and all thought in a state of harmony; brings peace and rest to the soul and puts the mind in a state where it is one with God. Science may not be able to explain this, but this is a fact which can be verified by experiment (Lecture: "The Kingdom of Heaven").

Meditate on Om and be a *giver* of peace to mankind and not an expectant *seeker* (From a letter written to Mrs. Wellman, a student, on April 3, 1904.).

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa

On Sunday, December 30, 1883, Sri Ramakrishna asked a monk: “What is Brahman?” The monk answered: “Brahman is Sound. It is Om.” Sri Ramakrishna further asked: “But there must be something indicated by the sound [Om]. Isn’t that so?” To this the monk replied: “That itself is the thing indicated as well as the indicator.” [That is, Om is both God and the Name (Indicator) of God.] At these words Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi. That is, the immortal truth of the monk’s words lifted his mind into infinity, thus indicating their truth (See *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 372).

The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practiced austerity to realize the Sound-Brahman.

What will you gain, some sages ask, by merely hearing this sound? You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. 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 (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 404).

Another translation, by Sachindra Kumar Majumdar, is perhaps a bit more on target: “Sound Brahman. Rishis and sages used to practice austerities to hear that sound. Upon attaining perfection one hears the sound rising spontaneously. Some say, ‘What will you gain by hearing the sound only?’ You hear the rumbling from a distance. If you follow the roar you can reach the ocean. The roar indicates the presence of the ocean. If one follows the trail of the spontaneous sound one can reach what it indicates. It is this which has been called the supreme status” (5.14.2).

[Anahata] is a spontaneous sound constantly going on by itself. It is the sound of the Pranava, Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman.... A yogi alone knows that this sound originates from the Supreme Brahman (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 416).

The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in samadhi. It [Om] is like the sound of a bell: *t-a-m*. The yogi, by following in the trail of the sound Om, gradually merges himself in the Supreme Brahman (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 465).

Majumdar: “Twilight devotions merge in Gayatri, Gayatri merges in Om, Om merges in samadhi. It is like the sound of a bell, tam, t-a-m. Going beyond the trail of sound the yogi merges in Brahman” (1.11.2).

The Sandhya is a ritual done at the “junctions” (sandhyas) of the day—dawn, noon, and sunset—during which the Savitri Gayatri is repeated.

By “Gayatri” is meant the Savitri Gayatri, the great Vedic mantra for enlightenment. The idea expressed here is that the other mantras included in the ritual of the sandhya are eventually dropped and only the simple Gayatri is recited. Then, in time, the Gayatri itself is discontinued and only Om is repeated. And by the meditation of Om the aspirant “merges himself in the Supreme Brahman.”

The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om. A man is firmly established in spiritual life when he goes into samadhi on uttering ‘Om’ only once (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 586).

“When one goes into samadhi after uttering Om once, then one is secure” (Majumdar: 4.21.5).

By saying Om just once you get the benefit of crores [tens of millions] of sandhyas (*M—The Apostle and the Evangelist*, vol. I, p. 80).

One attains the Absolute by going beyond the universe and its created beings conjured up by maya. By passing beyond the nada one goes into samadhi. By repeating Om one goes beyond the nada and attains samadhi (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 263).

“One attains samadhi by piercing nada (the sound barrier). The nada is pierced through repetition of Om and one attains samadhi”

(The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Majumdar translation: 3.4.2).

Om is not counted among words (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Majumdar translation: 3.17.3).

From the same Om have come Om Shiva, Om Kali and Om Krishna (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Majumdar translation: 5.13.1).

Sri Ramakrishna was praying to the Divine Mother: “O Mother! O Embodiment of Om!” (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 299).

Ramana Maharshi

The Ekakshara [“One Syllable”–Om] shines for ever in the heart as the Self. Who is there anywhere who can write it down? (*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 145).

These two sentences are two lines of a couplet. A devotee of Ramana Maharshi had asked him to write in a notebook “at least an akshara [syllable].” In response the sage wrote these lines containing this valuable information regarding Om:

1) Om is the eternal Self—both the individual Self and the Supreme Self.

2) It radiates forever in the heart—and is therefore accessible to all.

3) As the nature of the Self (Atman) is pure consciousness, Om is not really a sound at all, but Consciousness itself.

4) Being Divine, Om is beyond intellect and speech, consequently it can never be “written down.” It is beyond all comprehension and its nature is inexpressible. Om is Brahman itself.

Incantation [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 Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 145).

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).

Om is the advaita mantra—the non-dual mantra—because it produces non-dual consciousness in those who invoke it. Since Om is the essence of all mantras it can accomplish whatever those mantras can—and much more. This is experienced through the meditation of Om which leads to samadhi that bestows liberation on the meditator.

Maunam [silence] is the state of Shakti [power] that emerges from within as Ekakshara [Om] (*Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G.V. Subbaramayya, p. 149).

Silence is both the witnessing of the emanation of Om from our inmost depths and the state attained by tracing that emanation back to its Source.

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 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).

Swami Ramdas of Anandashram

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.

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.

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. [Katha Upanishad 1:2:17]

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).

It is so in two ways—as a symbol and as a Name. As a symbol: 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 (Why?) Because Brahman is pleased with one who uses Om as an aid; for the scripture says, This is the best help and the highest. Knowing this help one is glorified in the world of Brahman [Hiranyagarbha] (Katha Upanishad 2:17).

The Supreme Self, being beyond the reach of the eye and other organs, cannot be perceived without some help, therefore the aspirant superimposes it with faith, devotion, and great rapture on the Syllable Om, as people superimpose Vishnu on images of stone etc. with carvings of his features. 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).

It [Om] is the Veda, (for) through it one knows what is to be known (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.1.1) There Om is the Veda or Name of Brahman. Through that Name the aspirant knows or realizes what is to be known: Brahman, which is the object signified or designated by the Name. Therefore ‘the Brahmanas know’ that it is the Veda: They mean that as a Name it is intended as a means to the realization of Brahman. Om is enjoined as a symbol of Brahman, for it is coordinated with the word Brahman in the sentence, Om is Brahman. Now it is being praised as the Veda, for

the entire Vedas are but Om: They all issue out of it and consist of it; this Om is differentiated into the division of Rik, Yajus, and Saman [Vedic meters], etc., for another scripture says, As by a stick all leaves are pierced, so all speech is pierced by Om (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.4).

Here is another reason why Om is the Veda—through it, this Om, one knows whatever is to be known; hence this Om is the Veda. The other Vedas owe their Vedahood to this. Therefore 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, which is the Udgitha. 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. 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 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.

It is well known that Om has the quality of fulfilling all desires.

He who meditates on Om becomes possessed of its quality. He who meditates on Om possesses the quality of fulfilling the desires of others. The meaning is that to him comes the result as stated before, in accordance with the Vedic text: 'He assumes those very

forms in [by means of] which he meditates on him.' [Mandala Brahmana].

Om is also possessed of the quality of prosperity. Being a meditator on Om as possessed of the quality of prosperity, one becomes endowed with that quality.

Now then, since Om is to be meditated on, it is being praised. For through Om the knowledge of the three Vedas is gained. 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.

Om is possessed of the qualities of being the quintessence, the fulfiller, and prosperity.

Because Om is the symbol of the Supreme Self it is the cause of immortality.

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).

Meditating on Om one is worshipped in the world of Brahman. The idea is this: Getting identified with Brahman, he becomes worshippable like Brahman (Shankara, Commentary on the Katha 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 (Shankara, 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 (Shankara, 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, 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).

Om is both the higher and the lesser Brahman. When the letters disappear [in the state of meditation], Om becomes verily the supreme Self that is Brahman....The idea implied is that it is coextensive with all that is inside or outside; it is birthless; and it is a mass of Consciousness, homogeneous like a lump of salt. Om is the origination, continuance, and dissolution of all—of the whole phenomenal universe....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. Having meditated on the all-pervasive Om, that is the Self beyond the worldly state, the intelligent man does not grieve, for no cause of grief can be possible then, in accordance with such Vedic tests as, ‘The knower of the Self transcends sorrow.’

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).

As the supreme Brahman cannot be directly indicated by words, etc., and is devoid of all distinctions created by attributes—and as it is on that account beyond the senses—therefore the mind cannot explore it. But to those who meditate on Om, which is comparable to the images of Vishnu and others, and on which is fixed the idea

of Brahman with devotion, that Brahman becomes favorable and reveals itself. This is understood on the authority of scriptures. Similar is the case with the lesser Brahman. Hence it is said in a secondary sense that that Brahman which is both lesser and higher is but Om. Therefore one who knows this attains either of the two [Brahmans] through this Om alone; only through this, that is a means for the attainment of the Self, consisting in meditation on Om; for Om is the nearest symbol of Brahman. The One is reached with the aid of Om, which is a vehicle of advance (Shankara, Commentary on the Prashna Upanishad).

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).

One should contemplate in one's mind, that is, meditate, that Om, as a word, is Brahman. For Om is all this. All that consists of sound is Om, since everything is permeated by Om in accordance with another Vedic text: As by the fibers the leaves are pervaded, so by Om is pervaded all speech (Chandogya Upanishad 2.23.3) And since all that is nameable is dependent on the names, it is said that all this is Om. Om is to be meditated on. Wishing to attain the supreme Self one utters [does japa of] Om; and he does indeed attain Brahman through that Om. The meaning of the passage is that, since the activities that are undertaken with the utterance of Om become fruitful, Om should be meditated on as Brahman (Shankara, 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 designator [vachaka] is the Pranava [Om]. Of the Lord who has been described, the designating 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.

It is the Lord who is expressed by the word Om; the sound of the Word accords with its meaning.

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. There are many sacred texts indicating that Om is Brahman.

The relationship between Brahman and Om is that of a lamp and its light....This is the relationship between the Lord who is expressed and the Pranava which expresses him.

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 bhavanam. Bhavanam 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 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.

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

Salutations to Dakshinamurti, who is pure and calm, the embodiment of pure knowledge and who is attainable through the Syllable Om (Hymn to Dakshinamurti).

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).

By means of Om we can align ourselves with him who is the true Guru of all sentient beings and receive his direct guidance.

Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri (Lahiri Mahasaya).

Om is radiant Light. When this Light is spread throughout the body, all is seen; then, there is no desire to speak and to look.

Om is pure Voidness.

Shunyata (voidness), is a technical term for the transcendent Parabrahman who is the No Thing (not to be confused with nothing). In the realm of Parabrahman all “thingness” is negated and only the Absolute exists resting in itself. It is pure Consciousness and pure Silence. Yet it is Om. It is essential for us to realize that the Silence is Om in its unmanifested (avyakta) form. Therefore Om is never transcended or “gone beyond,” for the Beyond is itself Om. Thus when in meditation we enter Silence, Om has not been gone beyond, nor has it “dropped away.” Rather, we are experiencing—we are actually *in*—the essential form of Om.

The sun is the form of Om.

That is, the sun itself is the radiant form of Om. The power emanating from the sun upon which all life is based is Om. The sun is

the most immediate “physical” form of Om we can experience, for it is really solidified, or materialized, Om. As an iceberg is formed of water, so the sun is formed of Om.

The sun is Om to the Source.

To its (and our) very Source, the sun is Om. That is, the sun is “pure” Om. Nothing else. This sentence may also mean that the sun of Om reveals the Source (Brahman) as the external sun reveals all outer objects including itself. Or it may mean that Om illuminates the realm of Brahman and is the means by which Brahman “sees” the entire range of relative existence. Or it may mean that as in meditation we move along the subtle sound of Om to the Source, so by means of the sun we pass to God along the Path of No Return at the end of earthly life.

Animals are enchanted by music; if a man is not attracted by the sound of Om, then he is an ass.

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 (Commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

Om is the flawless [pure] crystal Void (*Purana Purusha*, p. 224).

My [true] form is the formless Brahma Omkar (*Purana Purusha*, p. 224).

Sureshwaracharya

Om is the essence of all the Vedas and reveals the highest Truth. The method of concentration of mind through that Om is expounded for the sake of aspirants after liberation.

Om is the entire universe constituted by the three selves, Vishwa, Taijasa, and Prajna. This is so because there is no ultimate

difference between the name and the named and also because the two are never cognized in mutual separation (Panchikarana Varttikam).

Vishwa=the Self in the waking state. Taijasa=the Self in the dream state. Prajna=the Self in the deep (dreamless) sleep state.

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh

Patanjali insisted that a Yogi should have Om as his Mantra and he should meditate on its significance. Om is the name of the Atman. Om is Satchidananda. Om is omniscience, omnipotence, etc., light, joy and peace. Meditate on these ideas—then you will have Brahmic Consciousness. No doubt about it. Behind all names and forms, you will then perceive the Nameless and Formless Brahman (*Inspiring Talks Of Gurudev Sivananda*, by Swami Venkateshananda).

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....it 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 (*Japa Yoga*).

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.

Om is the only symbol for that Immortal, All-pervading Self. Think of Om to the exclusion of everything. Repeat Om mentally” (*Japa Yoga*).

Association with Om is to become one with the thing signified. “Its japa and bhavanam is the way.” You have to take the symbol of Om as Satchidananda Brahman or Atman. This is the meaning.

Meditation on Om with bhavanam and meaning leads to realization of Brahma-Jnana. This is Jnana Yoga. Merging of the mind in Om leads to Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

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! (*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. Om, as it is pronounced ordinarily, is an outward gross form of the real subtle inaudible state of sound which is called the amatra or the immeasurable fourth transcendental state” (*Japa Yoga*).

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. Even the letters a, u, and m do not really give the transcendental or original state of sound. Even this trilateral sound is only an expression or manifestation of the highest primal dhvani or

vibration. The transcendental sound of Om is heard only by yogis and not by the ordinary ear (*Japa Yoga*).

Have the picture of Om in front of you. Concentrate gently on this picture with open eyes. Associate the ideas of eternity, infinity, immortality, etc., when you think of Om. The humming of bees, the sweet notes of the nightingale, the seven notes of the scale in music—all sounds are emanations of Om only. Om is the essence of the Vedas. Imagine that Om is the bow, the mind is the arrow and Brahman or God is the target. Aim at the target with great care and then, like the arrow becoming one with the target, you will become one with God. You can also recite Om while meditating....He who chants and meditates upon this monosyllable (Om), meditates upon and chants all the scriptures of the world (*Dhyana Yoga*, p. 67).

Om is your best companion in life, because it gives you immortality and eternal bliss (*Divine Nectar*).

I sat alone on a block of stone
On the banks of the Ganges or Bhagirathi.
Mother Ganges blessed me.
I meditated on Om and its meaning—
The Word that is the symbol of Brahman.
The little personality was lost.
The mortal limit of the Self was loosened.
But there was infinite extension.
I entered into the Nameless beyond;
I realized the quintessential unity of bliss.
No words can describe the thrill of joy,
The magnanimous mystic experiences,
The supremest and divinest height of felicity!
The little “I” fused into the incandescent brilliance.
Two become one now
It was all Tejomaya Ananda—

**One Mass of transcendental light Bliss.
(*Vairagya Mala*, section 61).**

Swami Swahananda

The Natha Yogis specialized in the worship of Om along with that of Shiva. To them, Om is the first sound, the most elementary sound, the one unproduced, undifferentiated natural sound, the most spontaneous self-expression of energy or power in audible form. Om is the Name of the Supreme. Every uttered sound is particular, produced from the strokes of the vocal organs, and broken into parts. But Om is an *anahata-nada*, a universal continuous sound behind all broken sounds. It is in the heart, and the search for it is the search for Brahman. The steady and drawn out repetition of Om is prescribed as an effective help in this search. According to the Natha Yogis, the heart, the seat of the *anahata sound*, is not located in any particular part of the body, but gradually shifts from lower yogic centers to the higher ones and ultimately to the sahasrara where union of Shakti with Shiva is attained. Om, again, has been identified with the three gunas—sattva, raja and tamas—which constitute the world. It is also regarded as the original bija-akshara, or syllable source (*Mother Worship* by Swami Swahananda, p. 46).

I. K. Taimni

Dr. I. K. Taimni had a doctorate in chemistry, but was also a profound student of physics—Western and Oriental. Beside this, he was the head of the worldwide Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society (Adyar), and as such was spiritual guide to many aspirants throughout the world. The following is taken from his excellent commentary on the Yoga Sutras, *The Science of Yoga*.

The result of japa and meditation on the Pranava is the gradual disappearance of the obstacles which lie in the path of the yogi.

These obstacles are of various kinds—impurities and disharmonies in the vehicles, weaknesses of character, lack of development, etc. But Pranava, as we have seen, touches the very heart of our being, arouses in the microcosm vibrations which can bring out from it all the latent powers and faculties which lie sleeping there. So all obstacles, whatever their nature, yield to its dynamic stimulation. The deficiencies are made up by the growth of the corresponding faculties or the flow of additional power. The impurities are washed away. The disharmonies in the vehicles are smoothed out and the vehicles become attuned to one another and to the Supreme Consciousness of Ishwara. And so a complete regeneration of the individuality takes place, a regeneration which makes it fit to tread the path of Ashtanga Yoga or Ishwara Pranidhana....

The seven Sutras from 1:23 to 1:29 form, in a way, a separate set giving the technique of the path of mysticism on which the aspirant goes direct to his goal without studying and mastering the intermediate planes which separate him from the object of his search. On this path self-surrender is the only weapon, and in using this weapon japa and meditation on the Pranava constitute the sole technique. The japa and meditation turn the consciousness of the aspirant right about in the direction of his goal, remove all the obstacles, and self-surrender does the rest.

Dr. Taimni also wrote *Gayatri*, a study of the Savitri Mantra, the ancient prayer for enlightenment recited daily by Hindus. Since Om is an essential part of that mantra, both beginning and ending it, he has this to say:

The purpose of [Om] as already pointed out is to arouse the spiritual powers which are latent in the heart of every human being and which can be changed from the potential to the active form by the potency inherent in sound. Every Jivatma is a microcosm which contains within itself in a potential form all the powers and faculties which function actively and in their fullness in Paramatma, the macrocosm, just as a seed contains within itself the tree in a

potential form. Not only can all the powers and faculties which are functioning in Paramatma gradually find expression in the Jivatma through its evolution but as these powers appear progressively the consciousness which is manifesting through the Jivatma expands and becomes more and more one with the consciousness of Paramatma.

Pranava, Om, can hasten this process through the mantra shakti which is inherent in this particular combination of sounds. It is not an ordinary mantra with a limited objective and scope. Its power is the most comprehensive and fundamental among all the mantras. It affects the very heart of the Jivatma and the most important and fundamental relation existing in Nature, namely, the relation between the Jivatma and Paramatma. It is the vachaka of Ishwara as indicated in the well-known sutra: *Tasya vachakah Pranavah* (1:27)....Since Pranava is the vachaka of Ishwara the powers which can be aroused in the sadhaka and the expansion of his consciousness which can thereby take place are practically unlimited.

The whole of our religious literature is full of references to Pranava and its importance in the unfoldment of spiritual consciousness. In fact, practically the whole of the Mandukya Upanishad is a commentary on the nature of Pranava.

Swami Vivekananda

The goal of the universe is to realize oneness with the Om or One Existence (*Jnana Yoga*, section III).

Om is the greatest [mantra], meaning the Absolute (*The Four Paths of Yoga*).

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 (*Inspired Talks*, Sunday morning, July 7).

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 (*Inspired Talks*, Monday, July 8).

Ishwara is the Atman as seen or grasped by mind. His highest name is Om; so repeat it, meditate on it, and think of all its wonderful nature and attributes. Repeating the Om continually is the only true worship. It is not a word, it is God himself (*Inspired Talks*, Sunday, July 21).

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 (*Raja Yoga*, Chapter Five).

The commentator says the manifesting word of God is Om. Why does he emphasize this word? There are hundreds of words for God. One thought is connected with a thousand words; the idea "God" is connected with hundreds of words, and each one stands as a symbol for God. Very good. But there must be a generalization among all these words, some substratum, some common ground of all these symbols, and that which is the common symbol will be the best, and will really represent them all.

In making a sound we use the larynx and the palate as a sounding board. Is there any material sound of which all other sounds must be manifestations, one which is the natural sound?

Om (Aum) is such a sound, the basis of all sounds. The first letter, A, is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth. Thus, Om represents the whole phenomena of sound-producing. As such, it must be the natural symbol, the matrix of all the various sounds. It denotes the whole range and possibility of all the words that can be made.

Apart from these speculations, we see that around this word Om are centered all the different religious ideas in India; all the various religious ideas of the Vedas have gathered themselves round this word Om. What has that to do with America and England, or any other country? Simply this, that the word has been retained at every stage of religious growth in India, and it has been manipulated to mean all the various ideas about God. Monists, dualists, monodualists, separatists, and even atheists took up this Om. Om has become the one symbol for the religious aspiration of the vast majority of human beings. Take, for instance, the English word God. It covers only a limited function, and if you go beyond it, you have to add adjectives, to make it Personal, or Impersonal, or Absolute God. So with the words for God in every other language; their signification is very small. This word Om, however, has around it all the various significances. As such it should be accepted by everyone (*Raja Yoga*, commentary on Yoga Sutra 1:27).

The first manifestation of the repetition and thinking of Om is that the introspective power will manifest more and more, all the mental and physical obstacles will begin to vanish (*Raja Yoga*, commentary on Yoga Sutra 1:29).

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.

But it may be said that, although thought and word are inseparable, yet as there may be various word-symbols for the same thought, it is not necessary that this particular word Om should be the word representative of the thought, out of which the universe has become manifested. To this objection we reply that this Om is the only possible symbol which covers the whole ground, and there is none other like it.

The Sphota is the material of all words, yet it is not any definite word in its fully formed state. That is to say, if all the peculiarities which distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the Sphota; therefore this Sphota is called the Nada-Brahman, the *Sound-Brahman*. Now, as every word-symbol intended to express the inexpressible Sphota, will so particularize it that it will no longer be the Sphota, that symbol which particularizes it the least and at the same time most approximately expresses its nature, will be the truest symbol thereof; and this is the Om, and the Om only; because these three letters AUM pronounced in combination as Om, may well be the generalized symbol of all possible sounds.

The letter A is the least differentiated of all sounds, therefore Krishna says in the Gita: 'I am A among the letters.' Again, all articulate sounds are produced in the space within the mouth beginning with the root of the tongue and ending in the lips—the throat sound is A, and M is the last lip sound, and the U exactly represents the rolling forward of the impulse which begins at the

root of the tongue till it ends in the lips. If properly pronounced, this Om will represent the whole phenomenon of sound-production, and no other word can do this; and this, therefore, is the fittest symbol of the Sphota, which is the real meaning of the Om.

And as the symbol can never be separated from the thing signified, the Om and the Sphota are one. And as the Sphota, being the finer side of the manifested universe, is nearer to God, and is indeed that first manifestation of divine wisdom, this Om is truly symbolic of God (*Bhakti Yoga, The Mantra: Om: Word and Wisdom*).

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...* (*The Vedanta*).

There is this whole universe, and behind that is the name, what is called the 'Word' in all religions, and behind that is God. The universal thought is Mahat, as the Sankhyas call it, universal consciousness. What is that name?...According to the Hindus that word is Om. The old Egyptians also believed that. The Katha Upanishad says, 'That, seeking which a man practices Brahmacharya, I will tell you in short what that is, that is Om.... This is Brahman, the Immutable One, and is the highest; knowing this Immutable One, whatever one desires one gets.'

This Om stands for the name of the whole universe, or God. Standing midway between the external world and God, it represents both (*Addresses on Bhakti Yoga*).

'He whom the Vedas declare, he, to reach whom, we serve with prayer and sacrifice, Om is the sacred name of that indescribable One. This word is the holiest of all words. He who knows the secret of this word receives that which he desires.' Take refuge in this word. whoso takes refuge in this word, to him the way opens (*Notes of Class Talks and Lectures, Thoughts on the Vedas and Upanishads*).

Vyasa

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

Swadhyaya is repetition of the Pranava (Vyasa, 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 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).

Paramhansa Yogananda

When you utter ‘Om’ it travels not only all around the earth but throughout all space and eternity (“The Baptism by the Holy Ghost,” *East-West*, June, 1932).

Yogananda wrote the following chant:

**I am Om, I am Om;
Om, Om, I am Om.
Omnipresent, I am Om.
All-pervading, I am Om
All-blessed, I am Om.**

SECTION THREE:

THE GLORIES AND POWERS OF

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.).

“Brahman itself is of the nature of Omkara” (Ribhu Gita 17:40).

“Brahman is just one Syllable: Om. The Imperishable is just one Syllable: Om” (Ribhu Gita 24:21).

“Brahman is the Truth that is indicated as ‘Om.’” (*Yoga Vashishtha* 6:1:30).

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

“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).

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

“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).

“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).

“Pranava alone is Ishwara” (Lahiri Mahasaya in his commentary on the Yoga Sutras).

“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 Form) and Nirguna (Without Form) 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, *Satyartha 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

“Now 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 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).

“Omkaara is the holiest of holy things.... it is holy and full of sanctifying things. One shall worship Omkaara 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 four-fold state, is of the character of the Pranava” (Atharvashikha Upanishad 1:10a).

“All the gods take their origin from Om” (Dhyanabindu 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” (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, Vayaviasamhita 35:43, 46).

“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 udgitha [Om] as the Syllable. 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 Vivekananda, *Bhakti Yoga*, The Mantra: Om: Word and Wisdom).

“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, what is the udgitha is the Om. What is Om is the udgitha. And so verily, the udgitha is the yonder sun and the Om, 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).

“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 Brahmaloaka [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 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” (Mandalabrahman 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).

“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

jivanmukta” (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 [Paramapurusha] 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” (Turiyatita 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 invocers] 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

“Om embraces the state of waking in which the gross elements of existence are perceived, the state of dreaming in which the subtle elements of existence are perceived, the state of [dreamless] sleep in which the gross and subtle elements of existence are dormant, gathered up into their potential state, and the state of pure consciousness which reveals 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 the udgitha as this Syllable [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, which is the Udgitha. 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).

“One should meditate on the breath in the mouth as the udgitha, for it 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 should one 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 Brahmaloaka 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 Brahmanas 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 Vasishtha* 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 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 is the udgitha [Om], highest and best. This is endless. He who, knowing this, meditates on udgitha, the highest and best, becomes the highest and best and obtains the highest and best worlds. When Atidhanvan Shunaka taught this udgitha to Udara Shandilya, he also said: ‘As long as they shall know this udgitha 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, Vidyeshwarasamhita 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.

A BASIC SANSKRIT GLOSSARY

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.

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.

Adyasaakti: 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; So’ham.

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.

Anandamaya kosha: “The sheath of bliss (ananda).” The causal body. The borderline of the Self (Atman).

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 Noble Eightfold Path,” Buddha

actually said: “The Four Aryan Truths,” and “The Eightfold Aryan Path.”

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 (grihastha); 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 pipal (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.

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 (Sakyamuni) 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 So’ham is mentally intoned at each of the nine 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 dharmashastras 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.

Dweshha: 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.

Dwijia: “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-advitiam: “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.

Jagadguru: “World guru;” world teacher.

Jagat: World; cosmos.

Jagrat: 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.

Jivanmukti: 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.

Kala: Time; a unit of time; part; aspect; bit; death (or Yama); fate; black.

Kali: “The Black One;” the black-skinned goddess who emerged from the body of Goddess Durga to defeat the demons that were attacking her. She wears a garland of skulls (or severed heads) around her neck and a skirt of severed arms—both symbolizing the sense of egotism. In one hand she wields the sword of spiritual wisdom (prajna) and in the other carries a severed head (ego). Despite her fearsome appearance, her two other hands are held in the gestures (mudras) that indicate: “Fear not” and “Draw near.”

Kali Yuga: The dark age of spiritual and moral decline, said to be current now. See Yuga.

Kalpa: A Day of Brahma—4, 320,000,000 years. It alternates with a Night of Brahma of the same length. In the Day of Brahma creation is manifest and in the Night of Brahma is it resolved into its causal state.

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.

Khechari Mudra: “Sky-walking” mudra that enables the yogi to “move” in (or expand into) the Chidakasha. There are two forms of Khechari Mudra. In Hatha Yoga it is the insertion of the tip of the tongue into the nasal cavity above the upper palate. In meditation

(Dhyana Yoga) it is the gentle turning upward of the eyes as though looking at a point far distant.

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.

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 (110,000 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 Brahma—“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.

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.

Manomaya kosha: “The sheath of the mind (manas–mental substance).” The level (kosha) of the sensory mind. The astral body.

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.

Mulaprakriti: The Root [Basic] Energy from which all things are formed. The Divine Prakriti or Energy of God.

Mulashakti: Root power or energy; Mulaprakriti.

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.

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 nadis 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 qualityless 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 So’ham yogi of our times. His Chidakasha 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.

Pradhana: Prakriti; causal matter.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prajna: Consciousness; awareness; wisdom; intelligence.

Prajñanam Brahma: “Consciousness is Brahman.” The Mahavakya (Great Saying) of the Aitareya Upanishad.

Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator.

Prakash(a): Shining; luminous; effulgence; illumination; luminosity; light; brightness. Pure Consciousness, from the root kash (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.

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 tranquility, 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).

Punarjanma: "Birth again;" rebirth/reincarnation.

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.

Rajasik: 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 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, Vaisheshika, 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-anitya-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; Brahmajñana.

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 that 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.

Sanatana Dharma: “The Eternal Religion,” also known as “Arya Dharma,” “the religion of those who strive upward [Aryas].” Hinduism.

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.

Sannyasa: Renunciation; monastic life. Sannyasa literally means “total [san] throwing away [as],” absolute rejection.

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.

Santosh: 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.

Satsang(a): Literally: “company with Truth.” Association with godly-minded persons. The company of saints and devotees.

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. Samprajñata samadhi.

Seva: Service; selfless service.

Shabda: Sound; word.

Shabda Brahman: Sound-God; Brahman in the Form of Sound; Omkara; the Vedas.

Shabdakshara: “Sound-syllable;” Om.

Shaiva/Shavite: 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 (1): “The Auspicious One.” A title of Shiva.

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.

Sruti: That which is heard; revealed scripture in the sense of divine communication. Usually applied to the Vedas, Shankara also spoke of the Upanishads as Sruti.

Shuddha: Pure; clear; clean; untainted.

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 world-wide 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 is 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.

Sutatma: “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-mastery. 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-illuminated.

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.

Tapas: Trouble; acute anxiety; anguish; suffering.

Tapas 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).

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, harmless; 2) satya–truthfulness, honesty; 3) asteya–non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriateness; 4) brahmacharya–contineness; 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 yogi.

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 Yuga, 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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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 Bharat 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.

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