

Om

The Ultimate Word

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1.

Powerful Sound

There is no sound or sign more powerful than Om (*Aum*) in the Indian context. It is not a word, nor a letter; and hence there is nothing semantic about it. It is not even Sanskrit, nor strictly at all Indian. It shares the esoteric and spiritual character with expressions like *Amen* and *Amīn*. All religions of Indian origin, including Jainism and Buddhism (also Tibetan, Chinese, Korean and Japanese versions thereof) hold it in the highest esteem, especially in *upāsana*, *sādhana*, *askesis* or *Yoga*. It is described in the Upanishads as the 'one undying sound' (*ekākṣara*); and is regarded as holy as the Brahman. It is the picture or symbol of the transcendental and sole reality.

The underlying idea is that the supreme reality is beyond words : it is to be found in silence, in wordlessness. But it is the seed-sound (*bījākṣara*), from which all other words are formed, and in which all the word-meanings can be found. If it is taken as a word (*pada*), then the word is devoid of any transactional meaning. There is no word beyond it; it is in this sense the ultimate word (*paramam padam*), the supreme position, the goal of all beings. It is the bridge (*setu*) that the Upanishads locate between the words and the silence. It is *anāhata* (unstruck, inarticulate).

The traditional notion that it is constituted by three sounds अ, उ and ऋ (to be explained later) is to be understood in the context of these sounds (or rather sound-units) representing all the letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. In fact, all the other letters are only extensions, modifications or combination of these sound-units. The unit अ is traditionally regarded as symbolizing Vishṇu, the

very first outpouring of the divine, and the rock on which all transactions rest. It characterizes expiration (*visarga*). The second unit ॐ represents flowing forth, emanation, survival, continuation, preservation, integration of word and meaning (*śabdārtha*), transaction. The final unit ॐ (which represents anusvara) denotes closing up, withdrawal, comprehension, dissolution, inbreathing (drawing the air into oneself). ॐ is the navel, ॐ is the heart, and ॐ is the head. (*nābhi*, *hṛt* and *mūrdhā*). Together they constitute the spirit (*ātmā*), the vital power (*prāṇa-śakti*), life (*jīvita*).

It is therefore the most evidently distinct and easily distinguishable symbol of the supreme reality, in its transactional as well as transcendental aspects. It is a sign or symbol (*samjñā*) of the space, that is fundamental to the finite world of sounds and meanings, as also to the infinite world of silence. It is in fact a mantra, suitable for contemplation (**manana**) and for concentration (**ekāgratā**).



2.

Om & Prāṇāyāma

The Yoga-tantra ideology ascribes Om to the breathing process. The vital current (prāṇa) cannot be directly approached: it becomes tangible by the breathing process : inbreathing (prāṇa) and outbreathing (apāna). The prāṇa-śakti is visualized as 'hamsa' (divine swan, which swims in the celestial waters) : and the in-breathing makes the sound 'sa', while the out-breathing makes the sound 'ham'. The individual being constantly repeats 'ham' (exhalation, apāna) and 'saḥ' (inhalation, prāṇa). This is known as 'hamsa-mantra' (ajapājapa).

The details of hamsa mantra are given below:

1. Japa-viniyoga :

ॐ अस्य श्री अजपाजप मन्त्रस्य हंस ऋषिः ।

अव्यक्ता गायत्री छन्दः । परमात्मा देवता ।

हं बीजः । सः शक्तिः । सोऽहं कीलकम् ।

मोक्षार्थे जपे विनियोगः ॥ (हंसो हि जीवः ।)

2. Hamsa-gāyatrī :

हंस हंसाय विद्महे । सोऽहं हंसाय धीमहि । तन्नो हंसः प्रचोदयात् ॥

3. Dhyāna-śloka :

अग्निषोम गुरुद्वयं प्रणवकं बिन्दु त्रिनेत्रोज्ज्वलम् ।

भास्वद्रूपमुखं शिवाग्निगुलं पार्श्वस्थ सूर्यानिलम् ॥

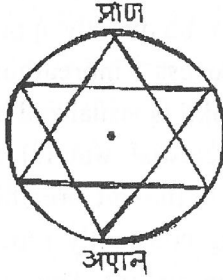
उद्यद् भास्करकोटि सदृशं हंसं जगद् व्यापिनम् ।

शब्दब्रह्ममयं हृदंबुजपदे । नीडे सदा संस्मरेत् ॥

4. Ātmāshṭākshara mantra :

ॐ ह्रीं हंसःसोऽहम् स्वाहा ॥

5. Yantra : (shāḍguṇya)



pūraka (ह)



rechaka (स)



kumbhaka

● jīva

But this internal articulation (ajapā-japa) is automatic and unconscious normally. It is only during askesis that one becomes conscious of this unconscious recital. We read in *Vijñāna-bhairava* (155)¹.

In the mantra हंसःसोऽहम्, Om is the principal detail. The first unit of Om, viz अ or अम्, is the junction-point of स and ह (हंसःसोऽहम् ॥); and this represents 'kumbhaka' (when स is 'rechaka' and हम् is 'pūraka'). The breath that neither goes in nor comes out is the vacuous interval, the prāṇa as such हंसः सोऽहं । पक्षद्वयत्यागात् (viz, ह and स) प्रणवः ॥ The kumbhaka may be either inside the body (antah-kumbhaka), after inhalation and before exhalation, or outside, after exhalation and before inhalation (bahih-kumbhaka). We read in *Śakti-sangama-tantra*- (सोऽहमित्यत्र देवेशि प्रणवः परितिष्ठति ॥) Normally, the kumbhaka (the interval between

¹सकारेण बहिर्याति हकारेण विशेत्पुनः । हंसहंसेत्यमुं मन्त्रं जीवो जपति सर्वदा ॥

Another version of the verse is

हकारेण बहिर्याति सकारेण विशेत्पुनः । हंसात्मिकां भगवतीं जीवो जपाते सर्वदा ॥

हकारस्य सकारस्य लोपे कामकला भवेत् ॥ *Śakti-sangama-tantra*

inhalation and exhalation) is either insignificant or unobserved. This kumbhaka is in fact the most important interval. It is there that life is contained. As Kāthopanishad (2,2,5) says

न प्राणेन नापानेन मर्त्यो जीवति कश्चन ।
इतरेण तु जीवन्ति यस्मिन्नेतावुपाश्रितौ ॥

cf also *ibid.*, 2,2,3:

ऊर्ध्वं प्राणमुन्नयत्यपानं प्रत्यगस्यति ।
मध्ये वामनमासीनं विश्वे देवा उपासते ॥

In fact, in the tāntrik texts prāṇāyāma (restraint of breaths) is identified with omkāra

वर्णत्रयात्मका ह्योते रेचकपूरककुम्भकाः ।
स एव प्रणवः प्रोक्तः प्रआणायामश्च तन्मयः ॥

The expression prāṇāyāma is explained thus :

1. rechaka (outbreath)
2. pūraka (inbreath)
3. kumbhaka (holding)
4. अ उम

The Kumbhaka itself is of four types :

1. bāhya-kumbhaka (outside)
2. ābhyantara-kumbhaka (inside)
3. kevala-kumbhaka (without pūraka or rechaka)
4. sva-kumbhaka, which is spontaneous and subtle (hence also called akumbhaka)

The Yoga counts four seconds as the time taken for one round of inhalation-exhalation; and thus the automatic recital of hamsa-mantra (hamsa-japa) is about fifteen times a minute. In one hour (15 x 60), there will be nine hundred repetitions. In one full day-night (or 24 hours) it will be 21,600 repetitions (900 x 24)¹.

This is automatic, spontaneous, albeit unconscious, japa; and one must attune himself to it, and become aware of the kumbhaka (viz. the breath that is neither inhalation nor exhalation, the breath that is non-breath). Om is not a mantra meant to be chanted or uttered; the Om that sounds in the very depths of ones being must be heard and experienced. In profound meditation, when mind is divorced from prāṇa, it is heard; when the mind has no words and lapses into silence, it is experienced.

It is the ultimate rest (vishrama), and therefore transcendental (parā). There is no duality there, and hence it is unarticulated (anāhata). It is the centre of ones being (hṛt). The prāṇa that originates here moves out through paśyanti and madhyamā and reaches a distance of twelve inches outside from nosetip (called dvādaśānta). When Om is uttered it follows the course of prāṇa. When, however, Om is contemplated upon, it moves from vaikharī (organ of speech) inwards and reaches the heart (viz. parā) passing through madhyamā and paśyantī. It is in the heart that the spontaneous Om is heard, and experienced.

In *Bhagavad-gītā* (8,12) we read : सर्वद्वाराणि संयम्य मनो हृदि निरुद्धं च । मूर्ध्नि ध्यायन्तः प्राणमास्थिते योग धारणम् ॥



¹षट्शतानि दिवारात्रौ सहस्राप्येकविंशतिः । जपो देव्याः समुद्दिष्टः सुलभो दुर्लभो जडैः ॥

3.

Om in Upaniṣhads & Scriptures

It is in the Upanishads that the significance of Om is described in some detail, and its importance in upāsanā highlighted. *Chhāndogya* (1,2,1) regards it as the sacred syllable (udgītha), suitable for devout contemplation; for it is imperishable and unchanging (akshara)¹

Māṇḍūkya (beginning), which belongs to Atharva-veda, also says : ओमित्येतदक्षरमिदं सर्वं तस्योपव्याख्यानम् ॥

Om is not only the one imperishable sound, but is all this (idam), what we perceive in front of us. And everything in the universe is but indicative of its presence, is but its articulation, its commentary, as it were : *Taittirīya-upanishad* (1,8) : ओमिति ब्रह्म । ओमितीदं सर्वम् ।

Om signifies Brahman; Om is all this, whatever there is in existence. Brahman is the highest reality, the most fully developed (parivṛdha, bṛhmaṇatvāt brahma), beyond which nothing can be.

Kaṭha-upanishad (1,2,16 and 17) calls it the supreme sign, the highest support, understanding which one abides in the abode that is Brahman himself. Om is the sign of Brahman, and knowing it, whatever one longs for will surely become his :

एतद्वचेवाक्षरं ब्रह्म ह्येतद्वचेवाक्षरं परम् ।

एतद्वचेवाक्षरं ज्ञात्वा यो यदिच्छति तस्य तत् ॥

एतदालम्बनं श्रेष्ठमेतदालम्बनं परम् ।

एतदालम्बनं ज्ञात्वा ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥

¹ओमित्येतदक्षरमुद्गीथमुपासीत ॥

Muṇḍaka (2,2,4)¹ has a picturesque imagery. Om is the bow, and oneself is the arrow; the Brahman, the supreme and sole reality, is the target. One who is ever mindful and alert must shoot, and he becomes one with the target even as the arrow strikes it.

The bow is meant for the arrow; and the arrow speeds only when shot through the bow. The Upanishad distinguishes Omkāra from Brahman; the former is near at hand, the self in the body, while the latter is far away (for the ignorant, but very near to those who know). The self has to make a journey from here to there. The same text makes Om the very teaching of all the Upanishads (aupanishadam mahāstram), and the dart well sharpened by devotion (upāsā-niśitam) (2,2,3)².

Here Omkāra is called praṇava, so called because it is the most excellent eulogy of Brahman (प्रकर्षेण न्यूते स्तूयतेऽनेनेति । प्रणौति स्तौति ईश्वरं । प्रणमन्ति अनेन इति वा ।). Patañjali's Yoga-sūtra (samādhi-pāda, 27) states :

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः ।

It is the word expressive (vāchaka or abhidhāyaka) of the lord (īśvara), viz. Brahman, who is the object signified by that word (vāchya). The power of the word to evoke the meaning is technically called 'abhidhā-śakti'; the word with this expressive power becomes a sign, a symbol (saṅketa), which not only provides information about the object (called in the Upanishadic passage, 'target', lakshya), but releases the energy directly and effectively (as the dart well-sharpened and let go steadily). The Upanishadic expression 'viddhi' above means both "know" and

¹प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते । अप्रमत्तेन वेदद्वयं शरवत्तन्मयो भवेत् ॥

²धनुर्मृहीत्वौपनिषदं महास्त्रं शरं ह्यपासानिशितं सन्धधीत ॥ आयम्य तद्भावागतेन चेतसा लक्ष्यं तदेवाक्षरं सोम्य विद्धि ॥

“shoot”. The sign (sanketa, viz. praṇava) illumines the relation between the dart (oneself) and the target (Brahman) तयोश्च वाच्यवाचकभावलक्षणः सम्बन्धो नित्यः सङ्केतेन प्रकाशते ॥

Further, the Mundaka Upanishad provides another equally interesting imagery (2,2,6)¹.

Om is the very hub of the wheel which represents our life; all the spokes (or dimensions of our individual existence) are settled in it firmly, tied to it well so that the wheel turns with ease and moves in comfort. The Omkāra it is that constitutes the vacuous space within the central hub which allows the wheel to turn. This reminds us of the significance of the expression ‘kham’ (sky, vacant space) used in *Yajurveda* to describe Om : ओं खं ब्रह्म ॥

Om is within every living being, moving all things in the body in a variety of ways. The Upanishad asks us to look upon our very self as Om and contemplate on it (omity evam dhyāyatha ātmānam). We are assured that this will take us beyond the darkness of transactional existence.

Śvetāśvatara (1,14) has still another fascinating imagery. It refers to the ancient custom of igniting the sacrificial fire by rubbing one fuel-stick by another stick placed above it. Ones own body (viz. individual existence, soul) is the fuel-stick (araṇi); one must place on it another fuel-stick that Om is, and rub. This rubbing (friction, firm, continuous and purposeful) is the meditation; it will bring out the Brahman, who is like the fire hidden in the fuel stick, concealed in ones own existence and brought out (flashed forth) by friction².

¹अरा इव रथनाभौ संहता यत्र नाड्यः । स एषोऽन्तश्चरते बहुधा जायमानः ॥

ओमित्येवं ध्यायथ आत्मानम् । स्वस्ति वः पाराय तमसः परस्तात् ॥

²स्वदेहमरणिं कृत्वा प्रणवं चोत्तरारणिम् । ध्याननिर्मथनाभ्यासात् देवं पश्येन्निगूढवत् ॥

An altogether different dimension of Omkāra (praṇava) is suggested by *Gopatha-brāhmaṇa* (3,11). Even as one uses a staff to cross over a ditch, one should use the praṇava as the prop, to go beyond the ills of existence. The prop may either be a stick held in hand, or a bridge thrown across. The idea is that without this dependence on a strategy one may fall into the ditch or into the ills of transactional life. The transactional existence is finite, fleeting, uncertain, and liable to death and disaster (mr̥tyu); to go beyond it, we must use that which is otherwise (amṛta), and this is praṇava¹.

This brāhmaṇa further describes Omkāra as a sure cure for all existential ills, and a help to attain utter isolation from all corrupting factors of life (1,30)².

Praśnopanishat (5,5) describes the one imperishable and immutable sound (akshara), viz. Om, as constituted by three measures (a, u and m); and one who contemplates on the Supreme Spirit (viz. Brahman) by this sound will abide in the very source of all light and energy, the Sun : यः पुनरेतं त्रिमात्रेणोमित्यनेनैवाक्षरेण परं पुरुषमभिध्यायीत स तेजसि सूर्ये सम्पन्नः ॥

Bhagavad-gītā (17, 23) identifies Om with two other expressions, which also signify Brahman, तत् (that) and सत् (real). ओतत्सदिति निर्देशो ब्रह्मणस्त्रिविधः स्मृतः ॥

The word तत् represents something which cannot be described in words, not having any visible or specific characteristics, and which cannot be visualized as distinct or distinguishable. In all that is in front of us (idam), 'that' is hidden

¹अमृतं वै प्रणवः । अमृतेनैव तन्मृत्युं तरति । तद्यथा मन्त्रेण वा गर्तं

संक्रमेत एवं तत्प्रणवेनापि सन्तनोति ॥

(मन्त्रेण सेतुना दण्डेन वा)

²आत्ममैषज्यमात्मकैवल्यमोङ्कारः ।

as the continuous presence. It is 'that' (removed from the apparent), because it is paroksha. The other word सत् signifies that which is altogether immutable, changeless, same in all three segments of time (trikāla-abādhita), past, present and future. It remains the same (समं ब्रह्म ।) .

We read in *Māṇḍūkya* also : भूतं भवद्भविष्यदिति सर्वमोङ्कार एव ।
यच्चान्यत्र त्रिकालातीतं तदप्योङ्कार एव ॥

ॐ

The discussion in Yoga-sūtra on Om is in the context of 'īśvara-praṇidhāna' (devout approach to the Godhead).

Patañjali in his *Yoga-sūtra* (samādhi-pāda, 24) defines 'īśvara' (the lord) who is represented by Praṇava, in terms of a special category of humanness, untouched by normal human needs, necessities, foibles and relations. क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः ॥

He is not a normal soul, but a human being nevertheless, one who has become isolated (kevali) from transactional stresses. He has reached the utmost state of excellence (निरतिशयचरमकाष्ठाप्राप्त), and becomes the source of omniscience (ibid., 25). He is also the guru, whose influence is uninterrupted by the passage of time (ibid., 26). He is, in other words, 'antaryāmin', the sage-seer of the praṇava-mantra that was referred to earlier. In fact, such a human being who is described as 'īśvara' is symbolized by the sound Om (ibid., 27). तस्य (ईश्वरस्य) वाचकः प्रणवः ॥

The sound Om is to be repeated reverentially (japa), and its extended import is to be creatively reconstructed (artha-bhāvana) (ibid., 28). तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम् ॥

The former indicates perfect concentration of mind, excluding all preoccupations and distractions, withdrawal from all transactional involvements, and with utter relaxation diving deep into the import of the mantra that is being recited : मनः संहृत्य विषयान् मन्त्रार्थगतमानसः । न द्रुतं न विलम्बं च जपेन्मौक्तिकहारवत् ॥

And the latter is synonymous with meditative absorption (dhyāna, dhāraṇā and samādhi). This entire askesis is styled in the Yoga text as devoted attention to the lord (ईश्वरप्रणिधानः), where the 'lord' does not mean God but only a freed human soul that serves as a conceptual model to inspire and guide the aspirants. He is a lord in the sense that he is perfectly free from all stresses, fetters and ignorance; he is no longer under the trammels of the guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas). And there is a relationship, unoriginated and enduring, between such lordship (aiśvarya) and omniscience (jñāna).

It is to be stressed that the 'īśvara' in *Yoga-sūtra* does not in any way denote a theistic spirit. It refers to a human soul in an extraordinary condition. The same meaning is conveyed by the expression 'ṛshi' (sage-seer). He is isolated from the transactional world, and is thus free (kaivalya), at any rate during the moment of his vision (darśana) of the mantra. He is transcendental in spirit, and thus becomes one with the parā aspect of Om. Then coming out of this identity, he immediately articulates his experience in the form of a mantra, which represents his vision. In this, he is a poet (kavi), an expression frequently used in the Veda for the sage-seer. And his poetic utterance is the chhandas, unique to his specific experience. It takes form out of his free will, and becomes forcefully charming (hence called chhandas). The deity (devatā) that is described or extolled in the mantra is but a variant form of the parā-Om. All the gods of *Ṛgveda* are but one real which the exalted sage-seers describe in diverse ways (1,164,46) : एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ॥

Also 10,114,5; कवयो वचोभिरेकं सन्तं बहुधा कल्पयन्ति ।

This is Om in its transcendental dimension, hence called 'tāra': अत एव तारयेद्यद्भवाम्बोधेः स्वजपासक्तमानसान् । तरस्तार इति ख्यातः ॥

5.

Om in Jainism & Buddhism

For the Jaina devotees 'Om' constitutes the most revered one-lettered mantra (ekākshara). It is best among the several mantras like :

the Pañcha-ṇamokkāra-mantra (35 lettered) :

णमो अरिहन्ताणं । णमो सिद्धाणं । णमो आइरियाणं ।
णमो उवज्झायाणं । णमो लोए सब्ब साहूणम् ॥

the abbreviated version of this (6 lettered) is :

अरिहन्त सिद्ध ।

or another condensation (5 lettered) :

अ - सि - आ - उ - सा ।

or the 4 - lettered :

अरिहन्त

or the 2-lettered :

सिद्ध

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the well-known Vajra-japa starts with Om (for inhalation), gets transformed as 'āh' for retention of the breath, which in turn is transformed in 'hūm' (for exhalation). There is a tradition that Om must be articulated at the throat-centre (visuddha), āh at the navel (maṇḍpūra), and hūm at the heart-centre (anāhata). Om is red in colour (air element, prāṇa, vital current) āh is yellow (fire element) and hūm is blue-black (water element): ocean, vacuity. The transformation of Om to hūm through āh is

termed parāvṛtti. Om is vacuity (śūnyata), which is the original nature of the three units of existence: kāya (existence; materiality), vāk (expression; sounds) and chitta (consciousness). From the three units, Om, āh and hūm, flash forth. (यथाक्रमं निश्चारयामास). More about the Vajrayāna view-point will be found later on. Suffice it here to mention that the Vajra-japa popular especially in Tibet is (ॐ मणि पद्मे हुं ॥). Maṇi here refers to the fabulous, bright and pure pearl, which is identical with Om. It is to be perceived in the heart-lotus (*padme*) by means of exhaling the breath (*hūm*). viz. making consciousness vacuous, thoughtless.



Omkāra is linked up in later tradition with Veda intimately and invariably. There is an injunction by Manu (*Smṛti* 2,74) as already mentioned that Om must be uttered before reciting a mantra and also after the completion of the mantra. The prior utterance of Om will prevent the leaking away of the power of the mantra; and the later utterance will help preserve the mantra's power intact. This is technically known as 'enclosing' (*samputa*)¹.

All Veda is said to have proceeded from Om (प्रणवाद्यास्तथा वेदाः) and Om is also the final statement of the Vedic Lore.

There is also this saying:

प्रणवाद्यं गृहस्थानां तच्छून्यं निष्फलं भवेत् । आद्यन्तयोर्वनस्थानां यतीनां महतामपि ॥

The householders must commence reciting the mantra with Om; or else, the recital would be in vain. The forest-dwellers and the ascetics must begin the mantra with Om and also end the mantra with another Om.

Why this insistence on associating Veda with Om? (सर्वमन्त्रप्रयोगेषु प्रणवः प्रथमः स्मृतः). *Kāthopanishad* (1,2,15) provides an explanation : whatever foothold for man is indicated by all the Vedas, that in brief is Om. It is to attain to this foothold that all austerities are resorted to; and it is for this that Brahman is diligently sought after :

¹ब्रह्मणः प्रणवं कुर्यादादावन्ते च सर्वदा । स्रवत्यनोक्तं पूर्वं पुरस्ताच्च विशीर्यति ॥

सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति । तपांसि सर्वाणि च यद्वदन्ति ॥
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति । तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीम्योमित्येतत् ॥

Bhagavad-gītā (8,11) has a corresponding verse :

यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति विशन्ति यद्यतयो वीतरागाः ।
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥

and further (*ibid.*, 13) there is a clarification :

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।
यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥

Praśnopanishad (5,7) makes the role of Om vis a vis the Veda more explicit :

By Ṛgveda one attains to this world in front of us; by Yajurveda the mid-region, and the celestial realms by Sāmaveda. All this is made possible by Om alone¹.

For this Om is the Brahman, tranquil, undecaying, immutable, immortal, devoid of fear and anxiety, and supreme. The three Vedas represent the three realms, which again are expressions of the three sacred utterances (vyāhrti) : bhūh, bhuvaḥ and suvaḥ (or svah), symbolized by three units of Om, (अ) (उ) and (म). The traditional view is that the Vedas are elaborations of the Puruṣa-sūkta, which in turn is an articulation of Gāyatri, the three pādas of which in turn are the emergent of the three vyāhrtis, representing the three units of Om (*Tantra-sāra* 1, 14-15)².

¹ ऋग्भिरेतं यजुभिर्न्तरिक्षं स सामभि र्यत्तत् कवयो वेदयन्ते ।

तमोकारेणैवातनेनान्वेति विद्वान् यत्तच्छान्तमजरममृतमभयं परं चेति ॥

² वेदमाता तु गायत्री द्विगुणद्वाशाक्षरात् । चतुर्विंशन्मूर्तयोऽस्याः कथिता वर्णदेवताः ।

तद्देवं पौरुषं सूक्तं वेदाः पुरुषसूक्तगाः ॥

Manu, however, speaks of the vyāhṛtis as being 'milked out' of the three Vedas, as also the three units of Om (*Smṛti*, 2,76)¹.

This is in view of the ritualistic requirement of the employment of the praṇava as the fourth (tāra) with the three vyāhṛtis, used collectively (samāsa) and individually (vyāsa) (*Tantra-sāra*, 1,38)².

Such employment of the praṇava with the vyāhṛtis would be symbolic of the recitation of all the three Vedas. The importance of the praṇava is in any case highlighted.

It is also to be noted that the praṇava is itself regarded as a mantra, complete in itself. For it refers directly to Brahman, the subject-matter and supreme spirit (विहितार्थस्याभिधायको मन्त्रः ।); and further, it is the cause of reflection indicated in what follows (मननहेतुर्मन्त्रः). The mantra tells us what to do, how to do, the purpose and the object of mental activity; and all mantras ultimately refer to the Brahman (the supreme spirit)³.

And as a mantra, the praṇava has four stages of development of the māntrika-varṇa : (i) the profound source of all sound (parā); (ii) the deliberation to articulate (paśyanti); (iii) inaudible articulation (madhyamā); and (iv) audible utterance (vaikhari). There are also the mention of the sage-seer, poetic form and the deity for this mantra, the praṇava (*Yati-praṇava-kalpa*)⁴.

¹अकारं चाप्युकारं च मकारं च प्रजापतिः । वेदत्रयाच्चिरदुहद् भूर्भुवः सुवरिति ॥

²समासव्यासयोगेन व्याहृतीनां चतुष्टयम् । तारेण व्याहृतीभिश्च ज्ञेयान्यङ्गानि पञ्च च ॥

³क्रियाकर्मेज्यकर्तृणामर्थं मन्त्रो वदत्यथ । मननात् त्राणनात् मन्त्रः सर्ववाच्यस्य वाचकः ॥

(*Rāma-pūrva-tāpinyupanīshad*)

⁴ऋषिछन्दोदैवतानि ब्रूयात् तस्य क्रमात्सुधीः ॥ अन्तर्यामीकृति गायत्री परमात्मेति अनुक्रमात् ॥

For the praṇava-mantra, the sage-seer is the inner controller (antaryāmi), the poetic form is the divine (daivī) Gāyatri (in three pādas and twenty-four varṇas), and the deity is the supreme spirit (paramātmā), sought after (pratipādyā). And the sage-seer and the supreme-spirit are one. They are two aspects (antarātmā and paramātmā) of the same spirit (ātmā), who is explained as one who transacts with the outer world but remains unchanged for all time¹.

This distinction between transactional existence (aparā or vyavahāra) and transcendental existence (parā or paramārtha) is fundamental to Indian thought. We meet with this idea again and again in the Upanishads; we find it even in the Ṛgvedic mantras. The Upanishads speak of the two aspects of Brahman (द्वे ब्रह्मणी वेदितव्ये परा चैवापरा च). We find *Praśnopanishad* (5,2) indicating that even the praṇava which is the vāchaka of Brahman (ओंकारो ब्रह्मवाची ।) has these two dimensions : तस्मै स होवाच एतद्वै सत्यकाम परं चापरं ब्रह्म यदोङ्कारः ॥

Om as the supreme and sole reality, unarticulated but inherent and hidden in all existence, is the 'parā' (transcendental aspect) while the three units, the three vyāhṛtis, the three pādas of Gāyatrī, the three realms of existence, the three Vedas are all articulations of this Om (the transactional, aparā). In other words, Om that is uttered at the beginning of the mantra is the parā aspect, while the mantra itself is the aparā aspect thereof. It is in this sense of development that the mantra is called brahmā (बृही वृद्धौ । बृंहतेर्नोऽञ्च ॥ मनिन्प्रत्ययः । बृंहति वर्धते इति ब्रह्म ॥).

It is also to be noted that the mantra is meant to transform the gross form and name into their ultimate sources. The form

¹यच्चाप्नोति यदादत्ते यच्चात्ति विषयानिह । यच्चास्य सन्ततो भावस्तस्मादात्मेति भण्यते ॥

(rūpa) is generated from Śiva and the name (nāma) is ultimately derived from 'śakti'. Śiva is pure consciousness (samrit, or ākāśa) and 'śakti' is energy or power. All forms constituted out of the primary elements (bhūta) disappear into vacuity (ākāśa), and merge with Śiva (the presiding principle of ākāśa); and all names, constituted out of articulated sounds, ultimately dissolve into the soundless sound (śabda) that is 'śakti'. We read in *Dhyānabindūpanishad* - सशब्दं चाक्षरे क्षीणे निःशब्दं परमं पदम् ॥

This transformation is a movement from transactional existence (aparā) into the transcendental reality (parā). If this is regarded as a development in askesis, the latter condition is brahma, in the sense of the final stage reached in the development process (बृही वृद्धौ).

Now, the sage-seer of the mantra (the ṛshi) is responsible for the mantra in its articulated form (the brahma). The real non-human origin (apaurusheyatā) is the Om in its parā aspect, for the developed form of the mantra is obviously of human agency (the aparā aspect). The sage-seer of the parā-aspect of Om is the self as the inner controller (antaryāmi) who is identical with the transcendental aspect of the Self (paramātmā). There is no human involvement in it, nor is it caused (hence anādi); it is eternal and immutable (nitya). It arises on its own, and is not occasioned by deliberation. It is not the Om that one utters in the form of letter (varṇa) and word. The real Om is vibrating everywhere including the human body, and all the time.



Also to be noted in this context is that the technique of pranava-japa is to begin with the vaikharī-dimension of articulation (viz. the audible sound produced deliberately by the vocal cords, throat and mouth), but proceed inwards. This utterance (speech) moves into subdued and subtle, visual and inarticulate sound (paśyanti), and finally merges in the Omkāra that is ever vibrating in the heart (hṛt, parā-vāk). This is the reverse (vyutkarma) of the normal tendency of speech, which originates in parā, but moves outside to paśyanti, madhyamā and vaikharī, in order. If this characterizes the utterance of Om, the reverse order represents the contemplation on Om.

This corresponds with the upāsana in Māṇḍukya: The soul (jīva) assumes three forms (called pādas): wakefulness (jāgrat) in the right eye (viz., all sense-organs), dream (svapna), in the throat, and deep sleep (sushupti) in the heart (दक्षिणाक्षिणि विश्वस्तैजसः कण्ठे हृदि पाद्मः ।) The Omkāra has three units (mātrās) corresponding to these forms (pādas). The Upanishad says पादा मात्राः मात्राश्च पादाः । The contemplation on Om here begins with navel (nābhau akārah), goes upto the heart (hṛdi ukārah), and reaches the head (mūrdhni makārah).

According to *Praśnapanishad* (5,1), it is this Om that the mortal man should constantly contemplate upon¹.

The sage-seer of the mantra in its articulate form (words and meanings) is no doubt a human being in all his functional dimensions (hence called purusha); and therefore it appears

¹अथ हैनं शैब्यः सत्यकामं पप्रच्छ स यो ह वै तद्भगवन् मनुष्येषु प्रायणान्तमोङ्कारमभिध्यायीत ॥

reasonable to describe the mantra as of human origin (paurusheya). But the Om at the beginning and also at the end, signifies that the mantra not only evolves from Om but is also withdrawn into Om; and naturally it is Om that pervades and sustains the mantra. Whatever the words or letters that constitute the body of the mantra, it is Om that is the soul of the mantra. In fact, all the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are regarded as evolved from the initial unit of Om, viz. (ॐ), and thus all words are rooted in Om¹.

Further, the sage-seer (Viśvāmitra, his son Madhu chchandas, or any other) is not to be considered as a normal human being when he sees or visualizes a mantra (becoming thereby a mantra-drashtṛ). He is when visualizing the mantra in an extraordinary state, with blazing light within (antah-prakāśa) and an exalted mind; he is then all-knowing and aware of things normally beyond understanding. He is out of contact with the transactional world, and in tune with the transcendental dimension of reality. His consciousness at that time is not normal human, and what he utters during this state of exaltation or possession cannot be described as human in origin (paurusheya).



¹पञ्चांशद्वर्णभिन्नाश्च सर्वशब्दा अतोऽपि ॥ ओंकारे सर्वा वाक् संतृण्णा ॥

The Vedāntic view, crystallized in the aphorism (4,1,5) in the *Vedānta-mīmāṃsā-sūtra*, is that one must look upon everything as principally the supreme spirit. ब्रह्मदृष्टिरुत्कर्षात् ॥

Omkāra must be regarded as the transcendental as well as transactional Brahman. In fact, when *Māṇḍūkya-upanishad* speaks of Om as the 'akshara' comprehending 'this' (एतत्) pointing to the heart) as well as 'all this' (इदं सर्वं), referring to the world outside), the identity of the transcendental and the transactional is indicated. The expression 'akshara' in the context has four nuances of meaning :

- (i) (न क्षरतीति), which does not wear out, decay, change or die;
- (ii) (अ + क्षरति), from which (अ) all phenomena flow-out, emerge, appear; and (अ) is Brahman (अकारो वै विष्णुः ॥).

(अ) is the sound that proceeds from the throat; it is the nāda or unmanifest vowel, indispensable and basic to all articulation.

- (iii) (अ + क्ष + र), which encompasses the entire transactional world constituted by speech, sounds from (अ) to(क्ष) in the Sanskrit alphabet; and
- (iv) अक्ष + र, the undecaying power inherent in the sense - functions (aksha), pointing to the one consciousness implicit in all manifold experience.

The sound Om constituted by the three aksharas or sound units ((अ). (उ)and (म)) is regarded in Tantra as identical with the

supreme lord (viz. Brahman), the creator, preserver and the destroyer; and beyond the transactional dimension of existence¹.

We also read in Yoga-śāstra that Om is verily Śiva who creates all phenomena by pervasion and pulsation².

This is beyond form, which can be apprehended or otherwise dealt with, and therefore most significant. As Bādarāyaṇa has it (*Vedānta-mīmamsā-sūtra*, 3,2,14): अरूपवदेव हि तत्प्रधानत्वात् ॥

This one real is described as 'hidden' in the cavern of the heart of all beings; but everything finds its nestling rest in it; everything comes out of it, and returns to it, and it is the warp and woof of all things, pervading all beings, as *Yajurveda* (32,8) says : ओं वेनस्तत् पश्यन्निहितं गुहा सद्यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् । यस्मिन्निदं सं च विचैति सर्वं स ओतःप्रोतश्च वि भूः प्रजासु ॥

All the gods of the world are settled in it (*Rgveda*, 1,164,39): यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ॥

And that one principle alone is worthy of adoration (ibid., 5,51,16) य एक इत् तमुष्टुहि ॥

Likewise, all the mantras find their origin and fulfillment in praṇava; all the sage-seers find their ultimate identity in the antaryāmin of praṇava-mantra. The secret of the apaurusheyatā of the Veda lies here.



¹ त्र्यक्षरात्मकतारेण परेशः प्रतिपद्यते । पाता हर्ता च संस्रष्टा यो देवः प्रकृतेः परः ॥

² कार्यं यत्र विभाव्यते किमपि तत्स्पन्देन सव्यापकम् । सृष्टिश्चैव तथेवमाकृतविशेषत्वादभूत्स्पन्दिनी । शब्दश्चो अभवत्तदा प्रणव इत्योकारवाच्यः शिवः ॥

In this context, Vāmadeva's hymn (4,58) assumes considerable significance. It refers to the transcendental Om (para-Pranava) as the ocean (samudra), limitless, devoid of form, and widely pervasive. The imagery of ocean in Rgveda is symbolic of the atmosphere (antariksha) that yawns between the earth below and the sky above (cf. 7,6,7; 8,102,4; 10,5,1 and 10,45,3). The sage-seer's own mantra is like a wave (billow, ūrmi) that surges forward. It has a distinct and distinguishable form (called here ecstasy causing taste, madhu), and it carries visible light that draws near (upāmshu). The ocean is distant, but the wave reaches us. The ocean is immortal (amṛta), but the wave is finite and mortal; it rises and withdraws, it is born and it dies. When the wave withdraws, however, it merges with the ocean and becomes immortal (amṛtatvam samānaḥ). The mantra comes out of the praṇava, and becomes mortal. It however returns to the praṇava, and becomes immortal. This is the significance of apaurusheyatā¹.

The mantra also speaks of the hidden light in the ocean, and calls it ghṛta. The word ghṛta in Rgveda occurs very frequently in several contexts (like 2,3,11; 2,5,6; 3,1,18; 3,27,5; 4,10,6; 5,11,1; 10,12,3; 10,51,8; 10,70,8; 10,91,15; 10,122,2 and so on). The meaning is invariably light, clarity, luminosity and brilliance. This light refers no doubt to the one real (एकं सत् ||); which is hidden (guhyam) by the divinities that vibrate in the mantras. It is as if the divinities have found tongue (jihvā) to articulate. The 'parā' dimension is transformed by them into 'aparā'.

¹समुद्रादूर्मिर्मधुमाꣳ उदारदुपांशुना सममृतत्वमानद् । घृतस्य नाम गुह्यं यदस्ति जिह्वा
देवानाममृतस्य नाभिः ॥

However, it continues to be the source of immortality, the very navel (nābhi). The waves hide the ocean, but it is the ocean that appears like the waves. The expression chhandas means precisely this: the verbal form of the mantra hides the true (chhādane), but projects delight (āhlādane).

Then there is another mantra, well-known and mystic in significance (4,58,3). There is an obvious mystery that the mantra breathes. Commentators have seen in it references to Agni, Yajña, Sūrya, Śabda-brahman and so on, justified in the vagueness that surrounds the numbers and limbs that are suggested.

It is possible, however, to discern here a statement about the 'guhya-ghṛta' (the hidden light) that is referred to in the very first verse of the hymn¹.

The mantra seems to say that this strange 'bull' (vṛshabha) enters well into the mortal beings (martyāṅ ā vivesha), bellowing all the while (roravīti). It is described as the great god (maho = mahān, devah), luminous and sportive (etymologically signifying "dyotana" and "krīḍā"). What indeed is this 'bull' who is also 'the god'? The subsequent verse, however, tells us that this was stolen and hidden by the forces of darkness (4,58,4). Although it has entered into mortal beings, it lies hidden. This is the mystery that looms large.

The word 'vṛshabha' ordinarily means "bull"; but the large number of references in *Rgveda* (1.36.8; 1.36.10; 1.140.2; 3.27.13; 4.3.7; 4.3.10; 10.11.6; 10.115.8 etc.) suggests that it is but an image of strength, mastery, might, passion and vastness. One can easily see that it is another word for 'samudra'. Even as waves flow out of the ocean, the roarings come out of the bull.

¹चत्वारि शुक्ला त्रयो अस्य पादा द्वे शीर्षे सप्त हस्तासो अस्य । त्रिधा बद्धो वृषभो रोरवीति महो देवो मर्त्याँ आ विवेश ॥

The 'bellowing of the bull' (cf. 1.140.6 and 10.8.1) represent the mantras that are articulated (aparā Om), while the 'bull' itself is parā Om. The mantra in question describes the 'bellowing' of such a 'bull'.

It has four horns (śṛṅga 2, cf. 1.140.6; 5.2.9; 8.100.13), exuberances from the head. The four sound-units of Om are indicated here : (अ), (उ), (म) and (तुर्य). The first three are states (avasthās), while the fourth is existence itself beyond the states. The reference is to the four modes of existence. Three of them are transactional: wakefulness, dream and deep sleep. The state beyond (turya), is the transcendental state. These are mere outgrowths, visible, recognizable and enumerable, like the horns. The feet (pāda, from padyate anena) are three: the three vyāhṛtis (bhūh, bhuvah and suvāh); the three quarters. The reference is also to the three states (wakefulness, dream and sleep) which all of us are aware of, and through which we reach the fourth state (turya). Hence they are called 'pādas'. The two heads are evidently parā (transcendental) and aparā (transactional) dimensions of existence. The 'seven' hands (prehensile organs) refer to the seven Omkāras in the praṇava and the vyāhṛtis:

Om (आद्योङ्कारः प्रणवः)

Om bhūh Om (सम्पुट व्याहृतिः)

Om bhuvah Om (सम्पुट व्याहृतिः)

Om suvāh Om (सम्पुट व्याहृतिः)

एकोङ्कारा सम्पुटा च षडोङ्कारेति सा त्रिधा ॥

The number seven also refers to the seven organs through which we stretch ourselves into the outside, into the transactional world. They are the five cognitive organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin), mind (manas) and intellect (buddhi, the organ of

volition). The first five indicate the waking state. The sixth one the dream and the seventh the 'tamas' of sleep.

And the 'bull' is 'tied' (baddhah) to three pegs. Omkāra which is the bull rests on three units or mātrās, अ, उ and म. *Praśnopanishad* (5,3-5) speaks of the meditation on each of the mātrās (एकमात्रमभिध्यायीत ॥), on two of them together (द्विमात्रेण मनसि सम्पद्यते ॥), and on all three of them (त्रिमात्रेण ओमित्येतेनैवाक्षरेण), that is to say, on अ, अउ and ओम् respectively.



The next mantra refers to the three-fold concealment of the real light by false lights (paṇibhih); and to the wise folk discovering the light (ghṛta) with the help of the three units of Omkāra अ, उ and ऋ, represented by Indra (atmosphere), Sūrya (the celestial realm) and Agni (terrestrial realm) (4,58,4)¹.

The Paṇis (etymologically those who exert for selfish ends, from 'paṇ') in the Vedic narratives are cattle-snatchers; they drive away the cows stealthily and hide them in caverns in the uninhabited land. They represent sense-functions and lower mental processes, which take our attention away from the light of the spirit shining within us (the 'cattle' in the Vedic context meaning 'rays of light'). And their deceptions are three-fold, involvement in body, speech and mind. The three are the main architects of the transactional world in which we live. They make us outward-oriented, and the one real is thus screened from us. The light of this real which is here called 'ghṛta', is apprehended only by the luminous ones (devāsaḥ), the sages who are inward-oriented, the wise ones whose attention is focussed on the light within, on the bull and not on its bellowing.

The next mantra relates the ocean to the heart. The light within flows (arshanti) in a hundred streams (shata-vrajā), from the ocean in the heart (hṛdyāt samudrāt), for one who is inward-oriented².

¹त्रिधा हितं पणिभिर्गुह्यमानं गवि देवासो घृतमन्वविन्दन् । इन्द्र एकं सूर्य एकं जजान वेनादेकं स्वधया तिष्ठतक्षुः ॥

²एता अर्पन्ति हृद्यात् समुद्रात् शतव्रजा रिपुणा नावचक्षे । घृतस्य धारा अभिचाकशीमि हिरण्ययो मध्य आसाम् ॥

The heart-ocean is again mentioned in 5.58.11 (samudre ḥṛdi). The waves mentioned in 4.58.1 is here referred to as the hundred (that is to say, innumerable) streams (śata-vrajā).

It may be pointed out here in passing that in the spiritual discipline, three hearts are recognized : (i) one in the basal centre (mūlādhāra), (ii) another in the chest; and (iii) yet another in the head (śiras), where mind, intellect, egoity and deliberation abide. The three are identified in Tantra with Brahma-granthi, Viṣṇu-granthi and Rudra-granthi, the three knots that tie the transcendental self to the transactional self. From the Brahma-granthi (at the mūlādhāra centre), vital currents flow; at the Viṣṇu-granthi (at the anāhata centre) is the ocean of consciousness (हृद्यात् समुद्रात्); and from the Rudra-granthi (at the ājñā centre, middle of the eye-brows) thoughts, desires, resolutions and ego-involvements flow out.

The sage-seer of this verse beheld (abhichākaśīmi) the flow of light (ghṛtasya dhārā) the streams of pure consciousness at the anāhata centre, in ones own being. And this was unseen by the enemies of light (ripuṇā nāvachakṣhe), the paṇis who steal away light (the cattle being symbolic of light). The paṇis are the thoughts and desires, which hide the pure consciousness. In the midst of the flow of light (madhya āsām), there is this bright flame, golden-hued and fascinating (hiraṇyayo). This is the one real (एकं सत्), shining lustreously amidst multiplicity and deceit¹.

When the mind gets clear and purified (manasā pūyamānāh) inside the heart (antarhṛdā), the rays of light (dhenā) flow perfectly well like swift streams (sarito na samyak sravanti), like unto the antelopes (mṛgā iva) that flee speedily from the clutches of the

¹सम्यक् स्रवन्ति सरितो न धेना अन्तर्हृदा मनसा पूयमानाः । एते अर्षन्त्यूर्मयो घृतस्य मृगा इव क्षिपणोरीषमाणाः ॥

hunter (kshipaṇoh iṣhamāṇāh). The expression 'ūrmayah' (waves) occurs again. The light in the heart is the transcendental Om; the currents that stream out as waves represent the transactional Om. This happens when thoughts of the world are altogether absent. The metaphor of antelopes hurrying away from the greedy and violent hunter suggests the thoughts all dying down, leaving consciousness pure and clear. The mind is cleansed of thoughts arising from sensations, perceptions, imaginations and emotions. Mind, in other words, ceases to be transactional; it attains to the condition of being contentless and formless consciousness. It transcends its own normal nature, and settles down in the heart (antarhṛdā), when it can be washed by the uninterrupted and blissful rays or streams of the Real's light (ghṛtasya ūrmayah).

These floods of light are always there within us; but the thought-constructions that well up play tricks of light and darkness, screen them off. When the mind is busily involved in the world of objects and ambitions, the pure waters of consciousness appear muddied and restlessly stirred. This is looked upon as 'the enemy' (ripu), as 'the snatchers of cattle' (paṇi), and 'the hunter' (kshipaṇoh, kshepakāt). It is not a struggle between light and darkness, but between real light and false lights.

This struggle or encounter is mentioned in a later verse (4,58,11) 'samithe' (meaning "sangrāme")¹.

It is a struggle between diverse currents of water (apām anīke): one motley collection of tumbling currents that arise from outside of oneself (coming from objects and thoughts, sense and mind), and the other an uninterrupted, steady and peaceful flow of currents that stem from one's own heart (hṛdyantah). The latter is

¹धामं ते विश्वं भुवनमधि श्रितमन्तः समुद्र हृद्यन्तरायुषि । अपामनीके समिधे या आभूत
स्तमश्याम मधुमन्तं तमूर्मिम् ॥

described as the rays of the real light (ghṛtasya dhārā or ūrmayah); the heart that is the fount of this light is called the ocean within (samudra hṛdyantah).

It is interesting to note that the word for waters in Sanskrit, 'apa' (or 'āpah'), is derived from the root 'ap' meaning "to move", and also "to be" and "to beget" (as in apatya). It is the sense of movement that was responsible for the word's normal meaning as water. In the Vedic context, the waters carry light and are luminous (hence the expressions 'svarvatīr āpah' and 'āpo divyāh'. And they originate in the ocean (*viz.* the heart), and spread out. Ghṛta, which means light, real light, rich and warm, is also water; it arises as waves and currents (dhārā or ūrmayah); it stands for brightness, clarity of pure consciousness devoid of thought-constructions.

The encounter is between the waters that come from outside into the heart-ocean and the waters that originate in the heart-ocean and flow-out. This is 'apām anīke samithe'. The former represent transactional Om (aparā), while the latter signify the transcendental Om (parā).



The spiritual discipline (sādhana or yoga) involving Om assumes many forms. All of them, however, take into account the two aspects of Om : transactional (aparā) and transcendental (parā). The former recognizes the picture (called mudrā-lipi or samjñā) which symbolizes Om as an object of devotion. It is important to note that it is not a letter or a word; in fact, it is beyond words, beyond sound. It connotes an integration of अ, उ and ऋ representing the three dimensions of transactional life; wakefulness, dream and deep sleep.

Transcending these states, but inherent in them, is the Om that wells up within spontaneously as a result of spiritual practices. It is described as 'anāhata' (unstruck, uncaused), synonymous with the 'heart' (hr̥t), the centre of ones being. The three states are described as superimpositions (adhyāropa), and therefore unreal. The fourth state (turīya) is a sublation (apavāda) of these three states. It is the same as the Self, the ātman. It is the tāntrik kundalini which is at rest; the ascending kuṇḍalinī is the transactional aspect.

When *Māndūkya-upanishad* begins with the ascertainment of Om (Omkāra-nirṇaya), it identifies Om with the Ātma. It has already been mentioned that Yoga describes praṇava (viz. Om) as the name by which Īśvara is known (तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः ।). Implicit here is the distinction between the object to be known or predicated (vāchya, abhidheya) and the means of knowing it (vāchaka or abhidhāna). The grammarians speak of vāchaka or word (śabda) and the vāchya or meaning thereof (artha). The word is real, while the meaning is only ascribed to it, projected on it.

Nothing for them is beyond the word. The Vedāntins, however, do not accept the difference between vāchya (object or meaning) and vāchaka (word or name) as absolute (वाच्यवाचकाभेदस्यायात् ।) and they insist that reality (सत्, viz. Om, ātman) is beyond both word and meaning, but the ground (āspada) for both vāchya and vāchaka.

Omkāra is vāchaka as the sign or symbol (mudrā-lipi) and vāchya as the ātman (or Brahman). It is vāchaka when we recite Om in its articulated form (vaikhari), but when in japa, it passes through the madhyamā and paśyanti forms, it loses its transactional character and attains to the transcendental character at the parā level. Here, it is no longer vāchaka, nor can it be identified as vāchya. It is beyond both.

According to the Trika viewpoint, the real (viz. consciousness, the ātman) first transforms itself into the life-principle (prāṇa), the vital current that pulsates in all things in the universe प्राक् संवित् प्राणे परिणता ॥ This is the meeting point of the transcendental (paramārtha) and the transactional (samvṛti). The prāṇa is the praṇava.

The mudrā-lipi of Om illustrates the transformation of 'samvit' into 'prāṇa' : (Illustration - on the next page)

Ājñā (middle of eye-brows)	Śiva -(antar-dvādaśānta)
Nāsagra (Nose-tip)	Nāda (vimarsha); Sakti
Kaṇṭha (throat)	Prāṇa (out-breath) स
Mūlādhāra (navel)	(Bahir-dvādaśānta)
(Samvit)	Apāna (in-breath) ह
mātrā	(Prāṇa)
Bindu (prakāsha);	

(अन्तर्द्वादिशान्त)

BINDU प्रकाश

ŚIVA

ĀJÑĀ

NĀDA विमर्श

मू SAKTI

PRĀNA

NĀSĀGRA

(बहिर्द्वादिशान्त)

KANṬHA

ॐ

APĀNA

MŪLĀDHĀRA

The first constituent (mātrā) of the sign is the former half of sound the (अ); and then the second constituent is the latter half of the sound (उ); and the sound (म्) which pulsates in the head (mūrdhā) is denoted by the crescent moon on top (ardha-chandra), viz. nāda. If all this is transactional Om (aparā), the dot (bindu) above the crescent-moon represents the transcendental Om (parā). The bindu is identified with Śiva, in his aspect of withdrawal from the transactional involvement : बिन्दुर्म ईश्वरो ज्ञेयस्तिरोभाव उदाहृतः ॥

It is when the bindu bursts out (sphoṭa), the transactional world of multiplicity comes into existence : बिन्दुस्फोटनमात्रेण वर्णानां च समुद्भवः ॥

It is Śiva or samvit; the ātman (or Brahman), described as 'beyond' or the fourth (tāra, turya). Śiva is the light (prakāśa) of pure consciousness, while Śakti (represented by crescent moon) is the energy and deliberation (vimarśā).

Association with classical chakras (psychophysical centres of energy and awareness) is also obvious. The chakras are essentially centres, hierarchically arranged in the body, for focussing ones attention in spiritual discipline or askesis. They are centres where individualized consciousness (vijaṣṭi-samvit) can be localized and perceived. Principally, the centres of individualized awareness and energy (Śiva-Śakti) are mūlādhāra (around the navel, also called nābhi-chakra), anāhata (at the heart, called hṛcchakra), viśuddha (at the throat, or at the palate, kaṇṭha-chakra or tālu-chakra), nāsāgra (tip of the nose) and ājñā (middle of the eye-brows). Above this is the sahasrāra (the thousand petaled lotus on the crown of the head), which represents cosmic consciousness. (Śiva) abiding in individualized consciousness. Strictly speaking, it is not a detail of the individual organism. It is transcendental, in contradistinction to the other centres which are transactional.

12.

Om in Yoga of Trika System-1

Yoga of the Trika system recognizes twelve stratified levels or dimensions, in the individual being, the last of which is transcendental (śūnya). The first three are aspects of the praṇava (Om):

अ at the navel (nābhi or mūlādhara)

उ at the heart (hṛt or anāhata)

म at the mouth (root of the mouth or palate, tālu or viśuddha)

बिन्दु at the meet of the eye-brows; where mind abides (bhrū-madhya or ājñā; also nāsāgra).

अर्धचन्द्र on the forehead (lalāṭa) (ललना).

If this signifies the transactional (aparā) aspect of Om, the transcendental (parā) dimension has the following centres, above the forehead; and beyond the sign (mudrā-lipi) of Om.

निरोधिनी on top of the forehead (keśānta) (सहस्रार)

नाद on the crown of the head (mūrdhā or ushṇisha)

नादान्त at the brahma-randhra or aperture leading to cosmic consciousness.

व्यापिनी the pervasive centre above the body where individual consciousness meets with cosmic consciousness.

समना the centre where mind becomes coextensive with individual consciousness; the body-awareness disappears.

उन्मना the state of transcending this mind merged with individual consciousness, and dissolving individual consciousness in cosmic consciousness.

शून्य utter void (ātman); vacuity where existence and nonexistence become one; the transactional dimension is totally lost.

These levels are valid only in askesis. They are in fact stages of spiritual ascent or unfoldment (yoga). They signify the gradual withdrawal (nīvr̥tti) of the transactional mode (laukika) and the orderly approach to the transcendental mode (lokottara). It does not, however, mean that the two modes are altogether distinct from each other. In fact, they coexist, and are inseparable. This is emphasized by the concept of 'dvādaśānta', relevant in askesis. Literally the expression means 'at the distance of twelve finger-breadths'. The idea of the breadth of the finger refers to the width of the middle digit of the middle finger of ones right hand or the length covered by eight barley-grains (yavā) placed side by side in a line. It is this measure of the life-force of beings represented by Kuṇḍalini (in the form of the outgoing breath) that is expended every day. We read in *Rudra-yāmala* (17,18-19) :

द्वादशाङ्गुलमानेन आयुः क्षरति नित्यशः । द्वादशाङ्गुलवायुश्च क्षयं कुर्यादिने दिने ॥
यावद्वायुर्बहिर्ह्रियति कुण्डली परदेवता तावत्तावत्कुण्डलयं भवाब्धिपापविमोक्षणम् ॥

At the initial end of this distance or space is the heart-centre (hṛt), from where the prāṇa begins, and at the terminal end is the dvādashānta. The heart here does not mean the physical organ with that name, but the centre of individual existence.

Four dvādaśāntas are recognized in the texts

1. The distance between the navel and the heart (adho-dvādaśānta)
2. From heart to the throat.
3. From throat to the forehead.
4. From forehead to cranium (ūradhva-dvādaśānta)

13.

Om in Yoga of Trika System-2

There is another reckoning of the twelve details of the Trika-ideology mentioned earlier, grouped into lower (aparā), lower-higher (parāpara) and higher (parā) centres.

I Lower : (in the physical body) : the sthūlaśarira.

1. जन्माग्र at the level of the generative organ (linga) (जन्माधार)
2. मूल at the bottom of the spinal column, below the genitals (मूलधार) (ब्रह्मग्रन्थि) the initial knot that ties the soul to the physical body.
3. कन्द bulbous root (tangle of nerves) (स्वाधिष्ठान)
4. नाभि navel; umbilical plexus, (nirmāṇa-chakra) (मणिपूर)

II Lower-higher (in the sūkshma or subtle body) :

5. हृत् the heart (अनाहत) (dharma-chakra) (विष्णुग्रन्थि); the middle knot that ties the physical body to the subtle body.
6. कण्ठ the cavity at the base of the throat (विशुद्ध); above the spinal column (sambhoga-chakra)
7. तालु the palate, the root of the mouth.
8. भ्रूमध्य the middle of the eye-brows : thoughts (manaśchakra) (आज्ञा) parama-kula) (also (नासाग्र)); (शिवग्रन्थि)
9. ललाट the forehead; Om is the seed-sound here (soma-chakra) (ललना); (सोम) (अर्धचन्द्र)

III Higher (outside the body; and beyond the knots); para or karaṇa.

10. ब्रह्मरन्ध्र apex of the cranium (top of the head) निरालम्बपुरी (sahasrāra; niralambapuri); four angulas above the crown of the head.
11. शक्ति pure energy (outside the body)
12. व्यापिनी the pervasive awareness which flashes forth when Kuṇḍalinī reaches the sahasrāra (शिवव्याप्ति).

The three contact-points (2, mūlādhāra, which functions as brahma-granthi; 5 hṛt, anāhata, vishṇu-granthi; and 8, ājñā or nāsāgra, śiva-granthi) are where the three sound-units (mātrās) of Om, viz. अ, उ and म, are located. This is the transactional aspect (aparā) of Om. The fourth point (turya or beyond the physical and subtle bodies) is 10, brahmarandhra. This is referred in the celebrated Vedic verse (Purusha-sūkta, which speaks the Purusha transcending the body by 'ten' angulas (the number 10 signifying countless) अत्यतिष्ठदशाङ्गुलम् ॥

The sound-unit (अ) belongs to the aparā group, where brahma-granthi is located, and the sound-units (उ) occur in the parāparā group, where both Viṣṇu and Śiva-granthis are included. The parā aspect of Om is in the parā group, beyond the sign (mudrā-lipi). This is only to be experienced, and can not deliberated upon. It has no origination nor termination, either in time or in space.

The above enumeration of contact - points in the physical and subtle bodies, especially in relation to the sound-units of Om, also brings out a point of difference between Haṭha-Yoga and Raga-Yoga. The former, relying as it does on the physical and vital

forces operating in the body, seeks to transform the entities, functions, forces and experiences, by focussing attention on the nose-tip (nāsāgra-dhyāna), where the prāṇa enters and leaves the body. Rājā-yoga, on the other hand, works in the area above the nāsāgra tip of the nose or rather top of the nose. (bhrū-madhyadhyāna), especially the area of the head above the two ears. The principal centres here are ājñā and sahasrāra; in fact, the union of these two centres is sought to be achieved by Rājā-yoga. The contemplative absorption (samādhi) here is described as utterly devoid of mental constructs (nirvikalpa). This is what is known as vacuity (Śūnyatā), or adamant (vajra). The soul (jīva) here merges with the self (ātman). This is nirvāṇa or brahma-nirvāṇa.



Haṭha-yoga deals with the transformation (parāvṛtti) of the gross and the subtle bodies, whereas Rāja-yoga seeks to work at the subtlest level (mind, consciousness) in the parāpara group (indicated above) and unfolds the potentialities at the parā level. The best illustration of Rāja-yoga is Vajra-yāna, where mantra (the arousal of sound-seeds that are natural), mudrā (language of soundless sound) and maṇḍala (silent meditation) are employed. This is where Om becomes most significant. The Vajrayāna formula ॐ शून्यताज्ञानवज्रस्वभावात्मकोऽहम् ॥

illustrates the vacuous, conscious and adamant nature of Om which is the individual being's original nature. This is the parā aspect of Om. Haṭha-yoga operates in the aparā-dimension of Om, while Rāja-yoga works in the parā-aspect. A sādhanā of Vajrayāna describes the Omkāra as tantamount to the arousal of the thought of enlightenment (bodhi-chittotpāda) through the understanding of vacuity of all things¹.

As indicated earlier, there are several spiritual practices in India and in Tibet connected with Om. Most of them are associated with observation or regulation of breathing (prāṇa, prāṇyāma). This is based on the idea of equation of Omkāra, prāṇa and ātman. The presupposition in Yoga-sāstra is that the ātman (pure consciousness called variously chit, samvit, śūnya or īśvara) dwells not inside physical body but in the space above the head (known as parā, vyāpinī, brahma-randhra or śūnya), where it

¹बोधिचित्तोत्पादं च कुर्यात् रत्नत्रयं मे शरणं इत्यादिना । ततः शून्यतां विभावयेत् । सर्वधर्मान् निःस्वभावरूपान् विभाव्य अक्षराख्यं बोधिचित्तं स्वरूपं प्रभास्वरं (प्रकृतिदीप्तियुक्तं) आत्मानं पश्येत् ॥

is present in the real centre of ones being (the space of heart, hṛddeśa). Its reflection or representative in the psychophysical organism known as body (kāya) is prāṇa (the life-principle, para-devatā). This functions as awareness (jñāna-śakti), energy (kriyā-śakti) and will (ichchhā-śakti), and is responsible for transactional existence (samvṛti or vyavahāra). In contradistinction to this is the ātman, which is described as transcendental (paramārtha) to the psychophysical organization.



Omkāra (praṇava) comprehends the ātman as well as the prāṇa. It integrates the impersonal ātman with the personal prāṇa. And it makes the individualized life bloom into the universal existence; this 'growth' expansion or development is signified by the expression 'brahman' (from 'bṛhi' meaning vṛddhau, "to grow"). Hence the statements : ओमिति ब्रह्म । ओमितीदं सर्वम् ।

This also explains the philosophy and practice of prāṇāyama (as expansion of prāṇa) and the sādhanā of Soham (ajapā-japa or hamsa-japa).

The prāṇa articulating inaudibly but incessantly 'hamsah soham' as it takes the forms of inhalation and exhalation gives rise to the subtle Om, during the interval between inhalation and exhalation (known as madhya-daśā). It is the empty, vacuous condition, when prāṇa neither goes out of the body (prāṇa) nor enters the body (apāṇa). Prāṇa is here at rest (viśrāma), it is śūnya. We read in *Vijñāna-bhairava*, a Kāshmiri Śaiva text of immense esoteric significance¹.

The air is inhaled and exhaled. It is the energy of prāṇa (prāṇa-śakti) that makes the air come in or go out. But the energy itself neither comes in nor goes out. It assumes the form of the air (marut) that comes in and goes out, to render transaction (viz. awareness, action and deliberation) possible. However, it remains untouched by transactional vagaries. निर्विकल्पतया मध्ये शून्यतारूपता ।

It is void, devoid of action, in the 'middle' (viz. the interval between inhalation and exhalation)².

¹मस्तोऽन्तर्बहिर्वापि वियद्युगमनिवर्तनात् । न ब्रजेन्न विशेच्छक्तिः मरुद्रूपा विकसिते ॥

²कुम्भिता रोचिता वापि पूरिता या परा भवेत् । तदन्ते शान्तनामासौ शक्त्या शान्तः प्रकाशते ॥

After inhalation or exhalation, there is a brief, subtle interval of rest, which is not observed. One is asked to observe this period of rest, which represents the pure power of prāṇa (prāṇa-śakti), which is at once light and sound, tranquil and luminous. This vacuous interval is inside the body at the heart (hṛt), the centre known as 'anāhata', and also outside the body at a distance of twelve finger-breadths (dvādaśānta) from the nose-tip (nāsāgra). They are called respectively antah-kumbhaka and bahih-kumbhaka. Both are characterised by the potential prāṇa (prāṇa-śakti), which is perfectly quiescent (neither inhaling nor exhaling).

By observing serenely this interval, and by rendering the mind completely bereft of all-thought-constructions (nirvikalpa) this internal expands naturally, spontaneously and accompanied with a feeling of quiet happiness. This is called 'madhya-vikāsa'.

In the repeated utterance of 'hamsas-soham' along with the attention focussed on in-breathing and out-breathing, the sounds 'ha' and 'sa' associated with the breaths are abandoned, and Om alone remains, representing the interval (madhya-daśā, viz. prāṇa-śakti). Beginning with short intervals (hrasva, one-mātrā only), the articulation of Om becomes long (dīrgha, two-mātrā span), and gets further elongated (pluta, three and more mātrās). As the span increases the feeling of vacuity, rest and happiness also expands as stated in Vijñāna-bhairava¹.



¹प्रणवादिसमुच्चारत् प्लुतान्ते शून्यभावनात् । शून्यया परया शक्त्या शून्यतामेति भैरवि ॥

The long articulation of Om will end in the last of the four dvādaśāntas in the body (this is plutānta), beginning with the navel (nābhi) and passing through the heart (anāhata), throat (kaṇṭha or tālu), centre of the forehead (lalāṭa-madhyā), and top of the subtle aperture in the head (brahma-randhra), each of which is dvādaśānta, being located at the end of the distance of twelve aṅgula-measures from the starting point (technically called 'heart' or hṛt). Navel is the source of prāṇa : the out-breath starts there, and the in-breath ends there. At a distance of twelve-finger breadths above it is the heart-centre (hṛt), or anāhata. This is the first dvādaśānta encompassing the first mātṛā of Omkāra, viz (ॐ). The heart then becomes the starting point (hṛt), and a dvādaśānta (covering the second mātṛā of Omkāra, viz (ॐ)). With throat as the starting point (hṛt), the dvādaśānta that ends in the centre of the forehead will be the third (covering the third mātṛā of Omkāra, viz. (ॐ)). The fourth mātṛā of Omkāra, which has four quarters (chatuspāt), corresponds to the fourth dvādaśānta, which terminates in brahma-randhra on top of the head.

It is to be noted that the brahma-randhra is not a detail of the psychophysical organism which is pervaded, animated and regulated by prāṇa. It is outside the body, above it and independent of it. Thus the Omkāra which ascends to the last dvādaśānta, viz. brahma-randhra, transcends the scope of the prāṇa. The Upanishads speak of the prāṇa becoming 'virāt' (all-pervasive and luminous); it is no longer individuated and confined within the body. This signifies freedom from confinement or bondage (mukti, moksha). It is in this sense that prāṇa expands into brahman (getting identified with the ātman). The *Māṇḍūkya-upanishad* (2), which commences with the ascertainment of Omkāra (omkāra-nirṇaya), confirms the identify of Om with the ātman : सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म । अयमात्मा ब्रह्म । सोऽयमात्मा चतुष्पात् ॥

The Omkāra, identified with prāṇa within the body has three mātṛās, or pādas, (quarters represented by the three dvādaśāṣṭas), beyond which it gets identified with the ātman (represented by the fourth mātṛā, pāda or quarter). The fulfillment of Om is in the brahma-randhra, the final dvādaśāṁta, the turya (beyond the body)¹.

When the Omkāra, prompted by prāṇa-śakti, reaches to the top of the head, it breaks the body-barrier and crosses over by the bridge formed by the upward twist of the eye-brows. The mind freed from all-thought-constructs, the Omkāra rises above everything psychophysical, and becomes thoroughly expansive and free. The expansive void is experienced in ones own body, in all directions, and at once. It is like the luminous vast and clear sky, without a trace of cloud, allround².

There is for him an experience of void above, and void below, at once; the expansive prāṇa no longer is tied to the body; it has grown beyond it. And the experiencing mind too has become vacuous³.

In fact, the entire body is felt as vacuous; all the things that go to make up the body are in themselves pervaded by vacuity⁴.

One in that state is not aware of his body; his mind no longer thinks. His eyes are closed to the outside; he is altogether detached from the world around him, his attention is fixed on top of his head. In due course, he experiences the highest reality⁵.



¹तया पूर्वांशु मूर्धान्तं भङ्क्त्वा भ्रूक्षेपसेतुना । निर्विकल्पं मनः कृत्वा सर्वोर्ध्वे सर्वगोद्वमः ॥

²निजदेहे सर्वदिक्कं युगपद् भावयोद्वियत् । निर्विकल्पमनास्तस्य वियत्सर्वं प्रवर्तते ॥

³पृष्ठशून्यं मूलशून्यं युगपद् भावयेच्च यः । शरीर निरपेक्षिण्या शक्त्या शून्यमना भवेत् ॥

⁴तनूदेशे शून्यतैव यः क्षणमात्रं विभावयेत् । सर्वदेहगतं द्रव्यं वियद्ब्याप्तं विभावयेत् ॥

⁵कपालान्तर्मनो न्यस्य तिष्ठन् मीलितलोचनः । क्रमेण मनसो दाढ्यात् लक्ष्येऽलक्ष्यमत्तमम् ॥

It may appear curious that the earliest of Indian books, *Rgveda* does not contain this sound, explicitly or significantly at any rate. There are however three mantras where the derivative words 'omānām' (1,34,6 and 6,50,7) and 'omāsah' (1, 3, 7) occur. Both words are explained as derived from the root 'ava' meaning "to protect" (rakshaṇe, *Yāska*, 12, 40, ओमासः अवितारः । omāsah are protectors). The grammatical nuances indicated in the context are :

- (१) अन्येभ्योऽपि दृश्यन्ते । Pāṇini, 3,2,75 ओ + मन् । अनुनासिकग्रहणं चानुवर्तते । अवतेः मन्प्रत्यये तस्य टिलोपे ओमिति दर्शनात् ॥

(Kaumudī)

- (२) अवि सि विसि शुषिभ्यः कित् । *Uṇādi-sūtra* 1,141 अव रक्षणे पिवु तन्तुसन्ताने षीड् बन्धने शषु शोषणे इत्येवं धातूनां मन्प्रत्ययः । किञ्च ॥

The root 'ava' has more than twelve meanings. And all of them must be conjointly and equally valid in the Vedic context.

प्रवेशावगमादानतृप्तिरक्षाकान्तिगतिप्रीति-

स्वाम्यर्थासिद्धिस्तृद्धयः ॥

अर्था ज्ञेया विपश्चिद्भिरवधातोस्तु मनीषिभिः ॥

- (i) avati, praviśati (सर्वं व्यापकत्वेन, सर्वे च अस्मिन् प्रविशन्तीति ॥

"to enter" (by pervasion) : it enters into all, and everything enters into it. It is comprehensive and exhaustive in its scope. ओतत्ववाची ह्योङ्कारः ।

- (ii) *ava gachchhati, jānāti* (सर्वं ज्ञायते; सर्वैश्च ज्ञेयो भवति ।)

“knows” everything; it is knowable for all and by. The root ‘gam’, “to go” also has the significance of “to know” (गत्यर्थकधातूनां ज्ञानार्थत्वात् ।)

- (iii) *ādatte (sarvam)*, (प्रलयकाले सर्वं चराचरमादत्ते । सर्वैः ओदेयश्च ।)

“withdraws”, “takes away” everything during the great dissolution and also in periodical dissolutions like sleep, *samādhi* and *murchchā*.

- (iv) *avati, rakshati* (रक्षति सर्वान् ।)

“protects” all beings. This is the main etymological sense adopted by Yāska.

- (v) *trīpyati, tarpayati* (स्वयं तृप्तः । तर्पयिता च अन्येषाम् ।)

“is satisfied”; satisfies all creatures. The satisfaction is in terms of being full, and not wanting anything to fulfill itself.

- (vi) *kāntyarthe* (कान्तिमान् भवति । कान्तिं ददाति ।)

“to become luminous”; to bestow brilliance on others. It is the light (*jyoti, prakāśa*) that shines on its own; no other light is there to illumine it.

- (vii) *gatyarthe* (गतिमान् भवति । गमयति अन्यान् । परमा गतिश्च ।)

“to move”, “to go”; becomes dynamic, makes all things move; and is the final resting place of rest for all. This is the transactional aspect.

- (viii) *prīṇane* (प्रीणाति सर्वान् । प्रीतो भवति ।)

“to please”, “to delight”; causes happiness to all beings; becomes delighted by all things. Happiness is the nature of the self – existent light. It is because of this that all worldly happiness occurs. रसो वै सः । रसं ह्योवायं लब्ध्वाऽनन्दी भवति ।

- (ix) *svāmibhāve* (स्वामी भवति जगताम् ॥)

“to lord over”, “to rule”; it governs everything. This is the ‘Īśa’ of the *Īśāvāsya*-upanishad.

- (x) *prāpnoti* (प्राप्नोति । सर्वं प्राप्यते । सर्वैः प्राप्तः । प्राप्तसर्वस्वः)

“to obtain all things”; it is to be obtained by all. Whatever one gets is in reality, this supreme reality only; there is nothing else that is worthy of getting.

- (xi) *dīpyate* (दीप्यते स्वेन ज्योतिषा । दीपयति सर्वान् ज्ञानरूपेण ।)

“to shine”, “to illumine” : shines by its own light; lights up all things in the form of knowledge. The light of consciousness (*samvit*) is referred to here तेन भासा सवमिदं विभाति ।

- (xii) *vardhate* (वर्धते यथा यथा ज्ञानं दर्शकानां वर्धयति । सर्ववृद्धः, परिवृद्धः । सर्ववर्धकश्च ।)

“to grow”, “to develop”, “to unfold” : unfolds before the devotees as they grow in spiritual stature; grown to the fullest; helps everything grow. This is ‘brahman’ (from बृही वृद्धौ ।)

In the expression ‘Om’ all these meanings coalesce. In the first *Rgvedic* mantra referred to above (1,3,7), the word ‘omāsaḥ’ as the nominative of address in plural number for all the ‘luminous

spirits' (gods), (the sense functions and mind) who are beckoned to come near. This mantra has Aśvins as the devatā, and Madhuchchhandā-Vaiśvāmītra as the sage-seer : ओमासश्चर्षणीधृतो विश्वेदेवास आ गत ।

The gods (viz. the sense – functions, external and internal) are not only the protectors (avitārah) of all creatures, but are borne by all human beings (charshaṇī-dhṛta, manushya-dhṛtah). They appear and protect when they are besought. All the above twelve meanings hold good in the context. So also in the other verse 1,34,6 (Hiraṇyastūpa-āṅgīrasa is the sage-seer): ओमानं शंयोर्मकाय सूनवे त्रिधातु शर्म वहतं शुभस्पती ।

Where Om as the principle of felicity, delight, protection and light (omānam) is begged to be bestowed (vahaṭam) for obtaining happiness (śam yoh); it means protection (sharma) in body, speech and mind (tridhātu). Om has these three aspects : अ (existence), उ (expression) and म (mind).

In *ShuklaYajurveda*, Om occurs more explicitly and more specifically, as for instance in 40,15 (*Kāṇva-samhitā*, 40,17) : ओ३म् क्रतो स्मर । क्लिबे स्मर । कृतस्मर ॥

This is addressed to the empirical soul as the doer (krato) : “Be mindful of Om,” (om smara), for contented existence (klibe); remember your purpose of life (kṛtam)”. *Shukla Yajurveda* also explains that Om is the highest reality (40, 17)¹.

The face of the Real is covered by the golden lid (here, the Sun, whose brilliance hides the deity, “the real”, that is within him); whatever spirit is in the sun, hidden but real, that is in me

¹हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् । योऽसावादित्ये पुरुषः सोऽसावहम् । ओ३म् खं ब्रह्म ॥

also. And the expression signifying that the spirit is Om, devoid of distinguishable details (kham, viz. sky, vacuity). The Veda prescribes Om to be indicated as ओ३म्, the number 3 intervening between ओ and म् signifying the articulation in three or more measures (mātrās, viz. pluta). The three measures indicate the sound originating in the abdomen (mūlādhāra), proceeding to the chest (anāhata), and spreading in the head (ājñā), in turn representing Agni (अ), Vāyu (उ) and Āditya (म) in the three realms: terrestrial (bhūh), mid-region (antariksha) and celestial (svah).

It is interesting to note in this context, that Manu (2,26) regards the three constitutive units of Om as derived from three Vedas¹.

We also read in *Gandharva-tantra* वेदत्रयात्समुद्भूत्य प्रणवं निर्ममे पुरा ॥

And in another context (2, 74), Manu prescribes that Om is to be added at the beginning of each mantra as well as at the end, for if it is not there at the beginning, the essence of the mantra will leak away, and if it is not there at the end, the body of the mantra will wear away².



¹अकारं चाप्युकारं च मकारं च प्रजापतिः । वेदत्रयान्निरदुहद् भूर्भुवः स्वरिति च ॥

²ब्रह्मणः प्रणवं कुर्यादादावन्ते च सर्वदा । स्रवत्यनोक्तं पूर्वं पुरस्ताच्च विशीर्यति ॥

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