

# The OM Mantra and the Seven Levels of Consciousness

In [esoteric](#) practices, however, the [word 'kuan'](#) refers to an act of immersing oneself in a [physical](#) and [mental state](#) so as to achieve contemplated [reality](#). The [practitioner](#) puts himself in real [life](#) situations to carry out such an acts of contemplation according to esoterics. Thus [esoteric Buddhism](#) emphasizes '[kuan](#)', both in [action](#) and at rest.

Moreover, in [esoteric](#) practices, special emphases are placed on the arrangement of the [altar](#) and use of [mandalas](#). The four main classes of [mandalas](#) used in [esoteric](#) practices are (1) the maha-mandalas, representing the [Buddha](#) statue or image, (2) the [Dharma](#) or seed [mandalas](#), representing the [seed syllables](#) of the [mantras](#) as [embodiment](#) of [sutra](#) texts, (3) the [samaya mandalas](#), representing the instruments and [mudras](#) used in the [ceremonial](#) practices, and (4) [karma mandalas](#), representing the descriptions or [expressions](#) of [actions](#) and accomplishments of of the [Buddha](#) having the [function](#) of [cause and effect](#). All of such [mandalas](#) are used in association with [mudras](#), [mantras](#), and [Dharma](#) texts, forming the 'Triple [Dharma Seals](#) of the [True Reality](#), ' 'the One who has no second,' 'the [Absolute Reality](#)' through the union of the 'Three [Vajras](#)' of [body](#), [speech](#), and [mind](#). A [practitioner](#) is thus able to enter the state of the [Dharmakaya](#).

The OM [Mantra](#) and [Mandukya Upanishad](#): [Yoga Vedanta Meditation](#)

A Transcript Study of the Teachings of Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati on the OM [Mantra](#)

OM [Mantra](#) and the Seven Levels of [Consciousness](#)

The pinnacle of the [wisdom](#) of the [ancient](#) and practices of the [ancient sages](#) of [yoga](#) is contained in the terse 12 Verses of the [Mandukya Upanishad](#), which outlines the [philosophy](#) and practices of the OM, It has been said that the juice of the [Vedas](#) is in the [Upanishads](#), and the juice of the [Upanishads](#) is in the [Mandukya Upanishad](#).

OM [mantra](#) is also suggested as a direct grab to [Samadhi](#) in the [yoga sutras](#). The teachings of the [Mandukya Upanishad](#) are well worth deep study, [discussion](#), [reflection](#) and contemplation. By faithfully and intently engaging these 12 verses, all of the other written and [oral teachings](#) can be explored as the foundation [principles](#) and practices encapsulated in this succinct summary. It is not only the most [insightful writing](#), but also a complete outline for [Sadhana enlightenment](#) practices.

The OM mantra is the road map of the entire process of Sadhana and the most practical tool for self-realization. One of the other hundred plus Upanishads, the Mukti (or Liberation) Upanishad, explains that for those who are seeking Liberation, the understanding and practicing of the principles of the Mandukya Upanishad is sufficient for attaining that realization.

Verses 1 to 2 describe the Self and the Absolute. Verses 3-7 explain the four-levels of consciousness. Verses 8-12 outline the four aspects of AUM mantra. Briefly the 12 Verses are: 1. All is OM; 2. Self – Atman – Brahman; 3. Waking state – Vaishvanara; 4. Dreaming – Tajjasa; 5. Deep Sleep – Prajna; 6. Experiencer of the three; 7. Fourth state – Turiya; 8. A, U, and M of OM mantra; 9. A of AUM; 10. U of AUM; 11. M of AUM; 12 Silence after AUM.

Verses 1-2 are about the Self and the Absolute.

Verse 1: All is OM. The whole universe is the syllable OM/AUM. Following is the exposition of OM. Everything that was, is, or will be is in truth OM. All else which transcends time, space, and causation is also OM.

Verse 2: Atman has 4 aspects. 1) Gross | Physical Plane; 2) Subtle | Astral Plane; 3) Causal Plane/Source; 4) Fourth/Consciousness. All of these, everywhere is in truth Brahman, the Absolute Reality. Verse 2: The Individual Self itself (Atman) is also Brahman (the Absolute Reality) This Atman or Self has 4 aspects through which it operates.

Verses 3-7 are on the four levels of consciousness.

Verse 3: First is Waking or Gross – the first aspect of Atman is the Self in the waking state/Vaishvanara. In this state, consciousness is turned outward to the external world. Through its 7 instruments and 19 channels, it experiences the gross objects of the phenomenal world. Briefly those 7 instrument are Space, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth, along with the Individuation from the whole, and the flow of Energy. The individual operates the 19 channels (as explained in Verse 2), which are the 4 functions of mind: Manas (sensory, processing mind), Chitta (storage of impressions), Ahankara (I-maker or ego), and Buddhi (intelligence; knows, decides, judges, discriminates). These four functions operate through 5 Pranas: 1) Prana (heart, vitalizing, inhaling); Apana (base of torso, eliminating); Samana (naval, digestion, discernment); Udana (throat; exhalation); Vyana (whole body ; coordinate systems). The 5 active senses or Indriyas, Karmendriyas of eliminating, procreating,

moving, [grasping](#), and [speaking](#), and the 5 [cognitive senses](#) or Jnanendriyas of [smelling](#), [tasting](#), [seeing](#), [touching](#) and hearing.

Verse 4: The second aspect of [Atman](#) is the [Self](#) in a [Dreaming](#) state/Tajasa. In the second state, [consciousness](#) is turned towards the [inner world](#). It also operates through 7 instruments and 19 channels, which engage the [subtle objects](#) of the [mental realm](#).

Verse 5: Third state is Deep Sleep/Causal/Prajna. The third aspect of [Atman](#) is the [Self](#) operating in the Deep [Sleep](#) state. In this third state, there is neither the [desire](#) for any growth or [subtle object](#), nor any [dream](#) sequences. In Deep [Sleep](#), all such [experiences](#) have receded or merged into the ground of undifferentiated [consciousness](#). Here one is filled with the [experience](#) of [Bliss](#), and can also find the way to clearer [knowledge](#) of the 2 preceding stage.

Verse 6: Find the [Experiencer](#), the one who [experiences](#) all of these states of [consciousness](#) is the [omniscient](#), in-dwelling source, and director of all. This one is the [womb](#) out of which all of the other emerges, all things originate from, and dissolve back into this source.

Verse 7: The fourth aspect of [Atman](#) or [Self](#) is Turiya, literally the 4th. In this 4th state, [consciousness](#) is neither turned outward, nor inward, nor is it both outward and inward. It is beyond both [cognition](#) and the absence of [cognition](#). This 4th state of Turiya cannot be [experienced](#) through the [senses](#), or known by comparison, [deductive reason](#), or [inference](#). It is [indescribable](#), incomprehensible, and [unthinkable](#) with the [mind](#). This is [Pure Consciousness](#) itself. This is the Real [Self \(Atman\)](#). It is within the [cessation](#) of all [phenomena](#). It is [serene](#), [tranquil](#), filled with [Bliss](#), and is One without a second. This is the Real or [True Self](#) that is to be [Realized](#).

Verses 8-12 are the 4 aspects of AUM.

Verse 8: Those 4 levels of [consciousness](#) are the same, with the A, U, M, and [Silence](#). The OM, though described as having 4 states, is indivisible. It is [Pure Consciousness](#) itself.

That [Consciousness](#) is OM. The 3 [sound](#) A, U, M, and the 3 [letter](#) A, U, M, are [identical](#) with the 3 states of waking, [dreaming](#), and [sleeping](#), and these states are [identical](#) with the 3 [sounds](#) and letters. The 4th state, Turiya, is only to be [Realized](#) in the [Silence](#) behind, or beyond the other 3.

Verse 9: The [sound](#) A is waking/gross. [Vaishvanara](#) is the [consciousness experienced](#) during the waking state, and is "A" [sound](#), or A, the 1st [letter](#) of AUM. That simple [sound](#) of A first and



The OM symbol represents the seven stages of consciousness, which are experienced on the inner journey of meditation and contemplation. The four main levels of consciousness are:

- **Vaishvanara:** The gross realm of the waking state and the conscious mind.
- **Tajasa:** The subtle realm of the dreaming state and the active unconscious mind.
- **Prajna:** The causal plane, the deep dreamless sleep state and the latent unconscious, the domain of samskaras that are the driving force of karma or actions.
- **Turiya:** The fourth state, the absolute consciousness, which encompasses, permeates, and is the other three, and is called Turiya.

The OM symbol also represents the three transition states between these four states of consciousness. The fourth state, the absolute consciousness, is beyond both cognition and the absence of cognition, and is called Turiya.

These levels of consciousness are realities that exist universally, regardless of whether or not one uses the OM Mantra or the visual OM symbol in any way. The underlying principles are extremely useful for all seekers in purifying or clearing the mind and seeking the direct experience of deeper truths.

# OM Mantra and 7 Levels of Consciousness

by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

**Seven Levels:** The OM Mantra is a roadmap for sadhana, spiritual practices (written as either AUM or OM). It is not for the person who seeks only the shallow waters of spiritual life, but rather for those who strive to realize in direct experience the depth of the Absolute Reality. There are **four main levels** of consciousness outlined in the OM Mantra, along with **three transition levels**, which is a **total of seven levels**. Each of these is experienced on the inner journey of meditation and contemplation.

**Universal Realities:** It is important to be aware of the fact that these levels of consciousness are realities that exist universally, regardless of whether or not one uses the OM Mantra or the visual OM symbol in any way. In either case, the underlying principles are extremely useful for all seekers in purifying or clearing the mind, and seeking the direct experience of deeper truths.

OM / AUM and the Seven Levels of Consciousness
1. Waking / Conscious / Vaishvaanara / Gross / "A" of AUM
2. Transition / Unmani
3. Dreaming / Unconscious / Taijasa / Subtle / "U" of AUM
4. Transition / Aladani
5. Deep Sleep / Subconscious / Prajna / Causal / "M" of AUM
6. Samadhi
7. Turiya / Consciousness / Absolute / Silence after AUM

SwamiJ.com

- 
1. Waking / Conscious / Vaishvaanara / Gross / "A" of AUM
  2. Transition / Unmani
  3. Dreaming / Unconscious / Taijasa / Subtle / "U" of AUM
  4. Transition / Aladani
  5. Deep Sleep / Subconscious / Prajna / Causal / "M" of AUM
  6. Samadhi
  7. Turiya / Consciousness / Absolute / Silence after AUM

## Practicing the OM Mantra

---

The OM Mantra (AUM Mantra; Pranava) is a widely recognized mantra. While the OM Mantra has a variety of meanings, one of its most significant uses is for Meditation and Contemplation in Yoga and Vedanta. The OM Mantra is recommended in the [Yoga Sutras](#) and the Mandukya Upanishad, as well as in many other teachings.

**Four major levels:** When used in this way, the OM Mantra (AUM) has four major levels of meaning and experience to the Yogi.

- **Waking:** First, is the Waking state, represented by the sound of "A" of the AUM Mantra, called *Vaishvaanara*.
- **Dreaming:** Second, is the Dreaming state, represented by the sound of "U" of the AUM Mantra, called *Tajasa*.
- **Deep Sleep:** Third, is the Deep Sleep state, represented by the sound of "M" of the AUM Mantra, called *Prajna*.
- **Turiya:** Fourth, is the entire domain of that consciousness that permeates all of the other levels within which awareness does its dance, called *Turiya* (literally the "fourth"), represented by the Silence after the "A," "U," and "M".

In the actual practice with AUM Mantra (OM Mantra):

- **When awareness is on the "A"** of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:
  - the Waking state,
  - the Conscious level of mental processing, and
  - the Gross realm of the universe
  - (Waking, Conscious, and Gross are all at the same level, symbolized by "A" of the OM Mantra).
- **When awareness is on the "U"** of the OM mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:
  - the Dreaming state,
  - the Active Unconscious processing level of the mind, and
  - the Subtle realm of the universe
  - (Dreaming, Unconscious, and Subtle are all at the same level, symbolized by U of the OM Mantra).
- **When awareness is on "M"** of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:
  - the Deep Sleep state,
  - the Subconscious (latent, dormant, inactive, storage) aspects of mind (the Samskaras from where the impetus for Karma, or action springs forth), and
  - the Causal realm, out of which arises the Subtle and Gross universe
  - (Deep Sleep, Subconscious, and Causal are all at the same level, symbolized by M of the OM Mantra).
- **When awareness is on the Silence** after the A, the U, and the M of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have an awareness of the consciousness:
  - that permeates all of the three personal levels (Waking, Dreaming, Deep Sleep),

- that permeates all of the Subtle realm, and
- that also permeates all of the Causal realm
- (Consciousness permeates, is the foundation of, and in fact, "is" the whole of the levels of the A, the U, and the M levels of the OM Mantra).

One of the other elegant and awesome insights is the way in which our own personality, mental and emotional processes operate:

- **Latent impressions begin to stir:** We come to see, in direct experience of Yoga Meditation and Contemplation, how it is that there are latent impressions in the deep unconscious (the place of Deep Sleep; M of OM Mantra), and how it is that consciousness drifts over these latent impressions, causing them to stir from the Causal level (M of OM Mantra).
- **These impressions arise into internal action:** Then we see the way these impressions then arise into action internally in the Unconscious (the Active Unconscious associated with unseen mental processes and the Dreaming Sleep level; U of OM Mantra), forming many invisible thought processes, normally only experienced in dreams (this is similar to what psychology calls "primary process").
- **These stirrings come forward into the conscious:** Then we see the intriguing way in which those stirrings in the Unconscious (U of OM Mantra) come forward into the Conscious, Waking state of reality (A of OM Mantra), along with the way in which the *indriyas*, the senses (jnanendriyas of smelling, tasting, seeing, touching, and hearing) and means of expression (karmendriyas of eliminating, procreating, moving, grasping, and speaking) come into play so as to relate to the external world (A of OM Mantra).
- **We can observe the four functions of mind:** We come to see how the *four functions of mind* interact within these levels (A, U, and M of OM Mantra), including Manas (sensory-motor mind), Chitta (storehouse of impressions), Ahamkara (I-maker or ego), and Buddhi (which knows, decides, judges, and discriminates).
- **Seeing all the levels permeated by consciousness:** Most importantly, we come to see the way in which all of these levels are both permeated by, and are the manifestation of consciousness itself:
  - In Waking state (A of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In Dreaming state (U of OM Mantra) there is consciousness.
  - In Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In active thinking (A of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In unconscious process (U of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In the latent storehouse (M of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
- **Who we really are, is the consciousness itself:** We come to see that who we really are, is the consciousness itself, not the forms which arise. We declare with conviction, what the sages have said all along, "I am not my thoughts! I am That I Am!"

**AUM is like the three parts of a river:** When recalling these levels of "A," "U," "M," and Silence during practice of the OM Mantra, it is useful to remember the metaphor of a river, which has three parts:

1. **Bed:** The river bed of stones (like the latent, Subconscious or Deep Sleep level and its impressions, symbolized by the "M" of the OM Mantra),
2. **Flow:** The flowing part (like the Active Unconscious, or Dreaming level, symbolized by the "U" of the OM Mantra), and

3. **Surface:** The surface of the river (like the Conscious, Waking level, symbolized by the "A" of the OM Mantra).

**Consciousness at three levels:** That reality or presence of existence itself, that is in the three levels of bed of the river, flow of the river, and surface of the river, is like the consciousness that permeates the three levels of Waking (A of OM Mantra), Dreaming (U of OM Mantra), and Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra). Those three levels are also the Conscious (A of OM Mantra), Active Unconscious (U of OM Mantra), and Latent Unconscious or Subconscious (M of OM Mantra), as well as the Gross (A of OM Mantra), Subtle (U of OM Mantra), and Causal (M of OM Mantra) levels of reality.

- **Subconscious:** Our Subconscious wants, wishes, desires, attractions, and aversions (samskaras) are like those stones that form the bed of the river (M of OM Mantra).
- **Unconscious:** When consciousness moves across them, they come to life in the the flow of the Unconscious (U of OM Mantra), like the flow of the river, and
- **Conscious:** Some burst forth into the Conscious mind (A of OM Mantra), resulting in actions, speech, and conscious thoughts, like the action on the surface of the river.

**Going beyond the three levels:** Through practice, one gradually attains the ability to go beyond, or deeper than the various levels and thinking processes, to the direct experience of the source of the consciousness, symbolized by the Silence after the "A," "U," "M," of the OM Mantra.

The practice begins simply, is practiced sincerely and faithfully, and expands over time, with ever increasing insights about the underlying truths contained in, and suggested by the OM Mantra. [Meditation on OM](#) (AUM) as an object of concentration, and Contemplation on its meaning work together in guiding one towards Self-realization.

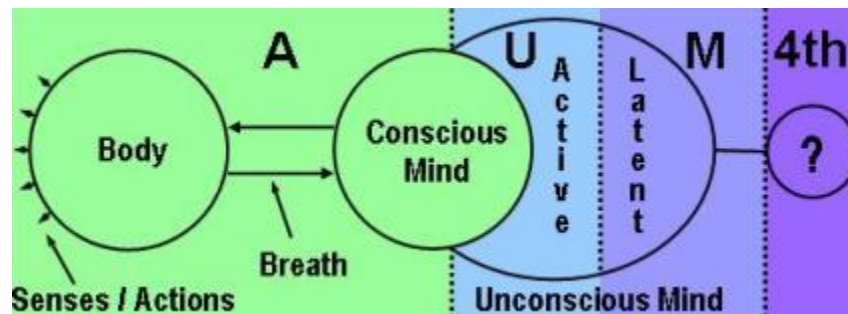
## OM Mantra and 7 Levels of Consciousness

by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

[Homepage](#)

This article is available in print:

**Seven Levels:** The OM Mantra is a roadmap for sadhana, spiritual practices (written as either AUM or OM). It is not for the person who seeks only the shallow waters of spiritual life, but rather for those who strive to realize in direct experience the depth of the Absolute Reality. There are **four main levels** of consciousness outlined in the OM Mantra, along with **three transition levels**, which is a **total of seven levels**. Each of these is experienced on the inner journey of meditation and contemplation.



(Scroll down or [click](#) to see Mandukya Upanishad on AUM)

**Universal Realities:** It is important to be aware of the fact that these levels of consciousness are realities that exist universally, regardless of whether or not one uses the OM Mantra or the visual OM symbol in any way. In either case, the underlying principles are extremely useful for all seekers in purifying or clearing the mind, and seeking the direct experience of deeper truths.

OM / AUM and the Seven Levels of Consciousness
1. Waking / Conscious / Vaishvaanara / Gross / "A" of AUM
2. Transition / Unmani
3. Dreaming / Unconscious / Taijasa / Subtle / "U" of AUM
4. Transition / Aladani
5. Deep Sleep / Subconscious / Prajna / Causal / "M" of AUM
6. Samadhi
7. Turiya / Consciousness / Absolute / Silence after AUM

SwamiJ.com

---



---

### Contents of this article:

[Seven States of Consciousness](#)  
[Direct Experience](#)  
[Yoga Sutras and OM Mantra](#)  
[OM Mantra and other Mantras](#)  
[Practicing the OM Mantra](#)

1. [Waking / Conscious / Vaishvaanara / Gross / "A" of AUM](#)
2. [Transition / Unmani](#)
3. [Dreaming / Unconscious / Taijasa / Subtle / "U" of AUM](#)
4. [Transition / Aladani](#)
5. [Deep Sleep / Subconscious / Prajna / Causal / "M" of AUM](#)
6. [Samadhi](#)
7. [Turiya / Consciousness / Absolute / Silence after AUM](#)

[Mandukya Upanishad - 12 Verses on AUM](#)

## **7 States of consciousness in OM Mantra**

---

Seven states or levels of consciousness are described in this article:

**Three states of consciousness:** Each of the three sounds of AUM Mantra (A, U, and M) symbolizes specific states of consciousness.

**Fourth state of consciousness:** After those three parts of the OM Mantra, there is a Silence, the Fourth, which relates to consciousness or awareness itself.

**Three transition states:** Between these four states of Consciousness there are three transition states.

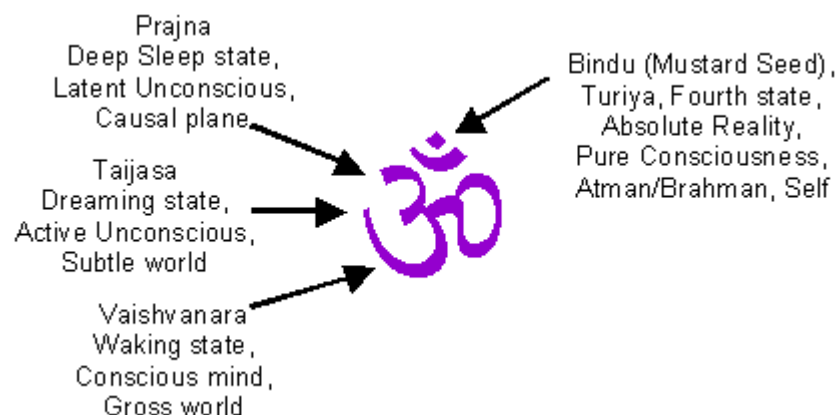
**See also:** The four main levels of Consciousness (A, U, M, and Silence of OM Mantra) are also described in the article [Levels and Dimensions of Consciousness](#).

**These levels exist universally:** It is important to be aware of the fact that these levels of consciousness are realities that exist universally, regardless of whether or not one uses the OM Mantra or the visual OM symbol in any way. In either case, the underlying principles are extremely useful for all seekers in purifying or clearing the mind, and seeking the direct experience of deeper truths.

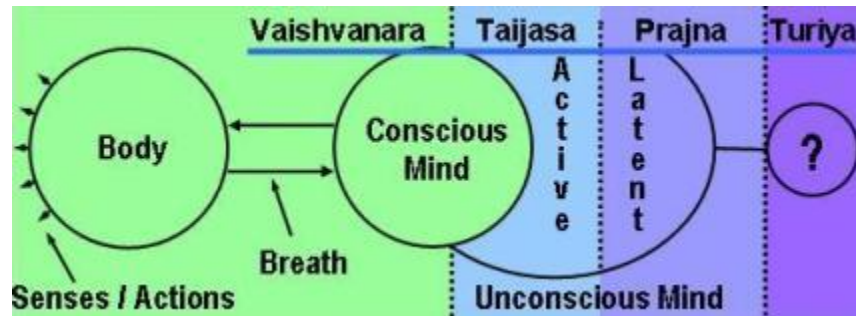


**Meaning of the symbol:** Not only does the sound vibration of the AUM/OM represent the four levels of consciousness, so too does the visual symbol.

- **The lower curve** represents the Gross, Conscious, Waking state level, called [Vaishvanara](#). (A of OM Mantra)
- **The center curve** represents the Subtle, Unconscious, and Dreaming level, called [Tajjasa](#). (U of OM Mantra)
- **The upper curve** represents the Causal, Subconscious, and Deep Sleep level, called [Prajna](#). (M of OM Mantra)
- **The dot, point, or bindu** represents the fourth state, the [absolute consciousness](#), which encompasses, permeates, and *is* the other three, and is called Turiya. (Silence after A, U, and M of OM Mantra)
- **The arc** below the dot symbolizes the separateness of this fourth state, standing above, though ever remaining part of the other three. [Piercing the bindu](#) finally allows one to attain the highest experience, and this comes after following the process of [Kundalini Awakening](#).



**Other names for the four levels:** Different texts and teachings might use different names for different characteristics at these four levels; for example, virat, hiranyagarbha, ishvara, and brahman, as well as vaishvanara, tajasa, prajna, and turiya.

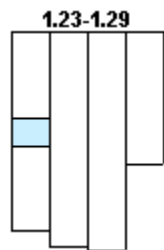


Swami Rama wrote a profound book on Om Mantra and Mandukya Upanishad entitled "Enlightenment Without God" that has been out of print for many years (it is not "anti" God). Here is a link to a [download PDF file](#) of this text that somebody sent me. (Or [here](#))

## Direct Experience

**Roadmap for direct experience:** The Yogi does not use the information about these levels as mere intellectual fodder. Rather, the OM Mantra is a roadmap for sadhana, spiritual practices. It is not for the person who seeks only the shallow waters of spiritual life, but rather for those who strive to experience nothing less than the depth of the Absolute Reality in direct experience.

## Sutras and OM Mantra



The [Yoga Sutras](#) of [Patanjali](#) suggests remembering the meaning of OM Mantra as a direct path to Self-realization. Remembering the sound vibration of AUM, along with a deep feeling for the meaning of what it represents, brings both the realization of the individual Self and the removal of obstacles that normally block that realization. (See Sutras [1.23-1.29](#))

## OM Mantra and other Mantras

It is important to know that OM Mantra is very often used in conjunction with other mantras, usually with the OM being the first or last sound in the whole mantra. Often these other mantras refer to a

specific deity or name of God. Some practitioners consider the OM to literally refer to only *one* such name of God or deity. Still other practitioners believe the OM refers to some *different* God or deity. For those born into such religious cultures, this diversity of use of OM is well known, and does not cause confusion, while also being aware that there may be discourses or debates supporting one view or another.

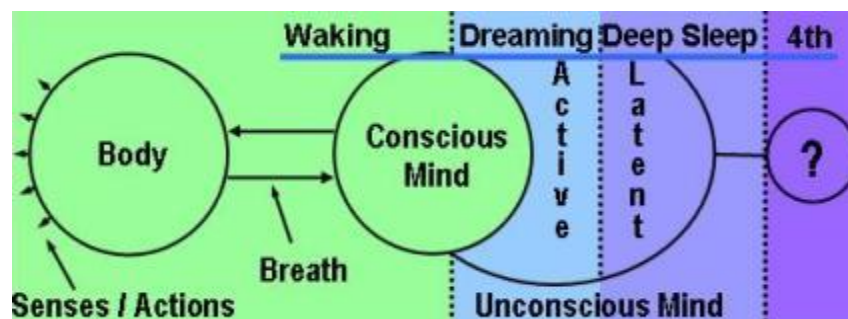
However, others who are not familiar with this will benefit by becoming aware that there are a variety of ways of using OM Mantra. This leaves it a matter of personal choice how the OM Mantra will be used. Regardless of how one uses the mantra, there is a universal truth that the vibration of OM will be experienced on the inner journey. In that sense, is not a mere belief or symbolic tool belonging to any one group or groups. Similarly, the existence of waking, dreaming, sleep, and that beyond (described below as represented by AUM) are also universal realities. In the information below, OM Mantra is presented as a means of contemplation and meditation, which pierces the three levels of reality and consciousness, revealing the fourth, which permeates the other three.

## Practicing the OM Mantra

The OM Mantra (AUM Mantra; Pranava) is a widely recognized mantra. While the OM Mantra has a variety of meanings, one of its most significant uses is for Meditation and Contemplation in Yoga and Vedanta. The OM Mantra is recommended in the [Yoga Sutras](#) and the Mandukya Upanishad, as well as in many other teachings.

**Four major levels:** When used in this way, the OM Mantra (AUM) has four major levels of meaning and experience to the Yogi.

- **Waking:** First, is the Waking state, represented by the sound of "A" of the AUM Mantra, called *Vaishvaanara*.
- **Dreaming:** Second, is the Dreaming state, represented by the sound of "U" of the AUM Mantra, called *Taijasa*.
- **Deep Sleep:** Third, is the Deep Sleep state, represented by the sound of "M" of the AUM Mantra, called *Prajna*.
- **Turiya:** Fourth, is the entire domain of that consciousness that permeates all of the other levels within which awareness does its dance, called *Turiya* (literally the "fourth"), represented by the Silence after the "A," "U," and "M".



**Three transition stages:** Between these four states of consciousness, there are three transition stages called *Unmani*, *Aladani*, and *Samadhi*.

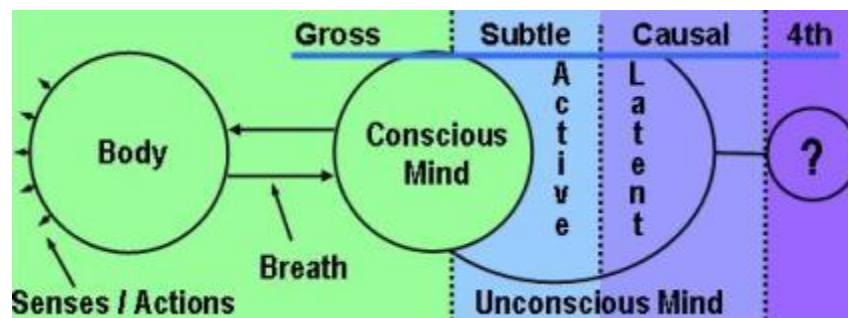
The Yogi wants to **remember the 4 parts** of the mantra, one after the other, along with the meaning.

**Remember the four parts one after the other:** Thus, in the use of the AUM Mantra, there are four levels of awareness that the Yogi wants to cultivate. The Yogi wants to remember the four parts of the AUM Mantra internally, one after the other, through the levels of consciousness. (The other three stages are also there, but these four are the main focus of the Yogi in using the OM Mantra).

**Remain aware of the meanings:** With practice, it gradually becomes easier for one to maintain awareness of these meanings as attention moves through the parts of the AUM Mantra (The A, U, M, and Silence of OM Mantra). Over time, that awareness brings increasing insight of the true nature of these levels of consciousness. Eventually one moves to the direct experience of the Absolute Reality, that consciousness which permeates All (Silence after A, U, and M of OM Mantra). This is the state of Self-realization.

**Three functions are at the same level:** One of the profound insights that one begins to get is the way in which 1) the levels of *personal consciousness*, 2) the stages of the *mental process*, and 3) the levels of the *universe parallel one another*. One comes to see that these three are functioning at the same levels of reality, which are none other than the levels of consciousness themselves. It is approximately like this:

- Waking = Conscious = Gross = Vaishvaanara (A of OM Mantra)
- Dreaming = Unconscious = Subtle = Taijasa (U of OM Mantra)
- Deep Sleep = Subconscious = Causal = Prajna (M of OM Mantra)
- Turiya = Consciousness Itself, permeating and being All (Silence of OM Mantra)



In the actual practice with AUM Mantra (OM Mantra):

- **When awareness is on the "A"** of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:
  - the Waking state,
  - the Conscious level of mental processing, and
  - the Gross realm of the universe
  - (Waking, Conscious, and Gross are all at the same level, symbolized by "A" of the OM Mantra).
- **When awareness is on the "U"** of the OM mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:
  - the Dreaming state,

- the Active Unconscious processing level of the mind, and
- the Subtle realm of the universe
- (Dreaming, Unconscious, and Subtle are all at the same level, symbolized by U of the OM Mantra).
- **When awareness is on "M"** of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:
  - the Deep Sleep state,
  - the Subconscious (latent, dormant, inactive, storage) aspects of mind (the Samskaras from where the impetus for Karma, or action springs forth), and
  - the Causal realm, out of which arises the Subtle and Gross universe
  - (Deep Sleep, Subconscious, and Causal are all at the same level, symbolized by M of the OM Mantra).
- **When awareness is on the Silence** after the A, the U, and the M of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have an awareness of the consciousness:
  - that permeates all of the three personal levels (Waking, Dreaming, Deep Sleep),
  - that permeates all of the Subtle realm, and
  - that also permeates all of the Causal realm
  - (Consciousness permeates, is the foundation of, and in fact, "is" the whole of the levels of the A, the U, and the M levels of the OM Mantra).

One of the other elegant and awesome insights is the way in which our own personality, mental and emotional processes operate:

- **Latent impressions begin to stir:** We come to see, in direct experience of Yoga Meditation and Contemplation, how it is that there are latent impressions in the deep unconscious (the place of Deep Sleep; M of OM Mantra), and how it is that consciousness drifts over these latent impressions, causing them to stir from the Causal level (M of OM Mantra).
- **These impressions arise into internal action:** Then we see the way these impressions then arise into action internally in the Unconscious (the Active Unconscious associated with unseen mental processes and the Dreaming Sleep level; U of OM Mantra), forming many invisible thought processes, normally only experienced in dreams (this is similar to what psychology calls "primary process").
- **These stirrings come forward into the conscious:** Then we see the intriguing way in which those stirrings in the Unconscious (U of OM Mantra) come forward into the Conscious, Waking state of reality (A of OM Mantra), along with the way in which the [indriyas](#), the senses (jnandriyas of smelling, tasting, seeing, touching, and hearing) and means of expression (karmendriyas of eliminating, procreating, moving, grasping, and speaking) come into play so as to relate to the external world (A of OM Mantra).
- **We can observe the four functions of mind:** We come to see how the [four functions of mind](#) interact within these levels (A, U, and M of OM Mantra), including Manas (sensory-motor mind), Chitta (storehouse of impressions), Ahamkara (I-maker or ego), and Buddhi (which knows, decides, judges, and discriminates).
- **Seeing all the levels permeated by consciousness:** Most importantly, we come to see the way in which all of these levels are both permeated by, and are the manifestation of consciousness itself:
  - In Waking state (A of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In Dreaming state (U of OM Mantra) there is consciousness.
  - In Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In active thinking (A of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In unconscious process (U of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.
  - In the latent storehouse (M of OM Mantra), there is consciousness.

- **Who we really are, is the consciousness itself:** We come to see that who we really are, is the consciousness itself, not the forms which arise. We declare with conviction, what the sages have said all along, "I am not my thoughts! I am That I Am!"

**AUM is like the three parts of a river:** When recalling these levels of "A," "U," "M," and Silence during practice of the OM Mantra, it is useful to remember the metaphor of a river, which has three parts:

1. **Bed:** The river bed of stones (like the latent, Subconscious or Deep Sleep level and its impressions, symbolized by the "M" of the OM Mantra),
2. **Flow:** The flowing part (like the Active Unconscious, or Dreaming level, symbolized by the "U" of the OM Mantra), and
3. **Surface:** The surface of the river (like the Conscious, Waking level, symbolized by the "A" of the OM Mantra).

**Consciousness at three levels:** That reality or presence of existence itself, that is in the three levels of bed of the river, flow of the river, and surface of the river, is like the consciousness that permeates the three levels of Waking (A of OM Mantra), Dreaming (U of OM Mantra), and Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra). Those three levels are also the Conscious (A of OM Mantra), Active Unconscious (U of OM Mantra), and Latent Unconscious or Subconscious (M of OM Mantra), as well as the Gross (A of OM Mantra), Subtle (U of OM Mantra), and Causal (M of OM Mantra) levels of reality.

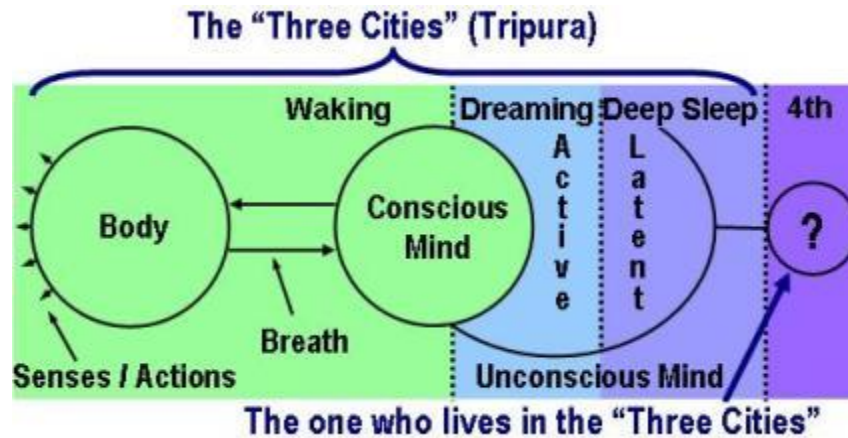
- **Subconscious:** Our Subconscious wants, wishes, desires, attractions, and aversions (samskaras) are like those stones that form the bed of the river (M of OM Mantra).
- **Unconscious:** When consciousness moves across them, they come to life in the the flow of the Unconscious (U of OM Mantra), like the flow of the river, and
- **Conscious:** Some burst forth into the Conscious mind (A of OM Mantra), resulting in actions, speech, and conscious thoughts, like the action on the surface of the river.

**Going beyond the three levels:** Through practice, one gradually attains the ability to go beyond, or deeper than the various levels and thinking processes, to the direct experience of the source of the consciousness, symbolized by the Silence after the "A," "U," "M," of the OM Mantra.

The practice begins simply, is practiced sincerely and faithfully, and expands over time, with ever increasing insights about the underlying truths contained in, and suggested by the OM Mantra. [Meditation on OM](#) (AUM) as an object of concentration, and Contemplation on its meaning work together in guiding one towards Self-realization.



**Tripura:** *Tri* means *three*, and *pura* means *city*. *Tripura* is the consciousness that operates in the *three cities* of Waking (A of OM Mantra), Dreaming (U of OM Mantra), and Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra), as well as the Conscious (A of OM Mantra), Unconscious (U of OM Mantra), and Subconscious (M of OM Mantra) aspects of mind. Sometimes conceptualized as the divine feminine (Shakti), compared to the divine masculine (Shiva), she permeates the *three cities* of the Gross world (A of OM Mantra), the Subtle plane (U of OM Mantra), and the Causal reality (M of OM Mantra). *Tripura* also permeates the many other trinities such as the beingness inherent in past, present and future.



This is a Tantric rendering of the three levels of consciousness mapped out by the OM Mantra symbol, and its levels of Vaishvanara (A of OM Mantra), Taijasa (U of OM Mantra), and Prajna (M of OM Mantra). Dedication, devotion, love, and surrender into this creative source or divine Mother is one of the finest aspects of Tantra as a direct route to Realization. Some conceptualize *Tripura* as an anthropomorphic deity, while the subtler practices are directed towards *Tripura* as formless, that *fourth* state beyond the other *three cities* (A, U, and M of OM Mantra). The *Bindu* of Sri Yantra is the symbol of this highest transcendent Reality (Silence of OM Mantra). The quality of the *three cities* is an aspect of OM Mantra, [Gayatri Mantra](#), and [Mahamrityunjaya Mantra](#).

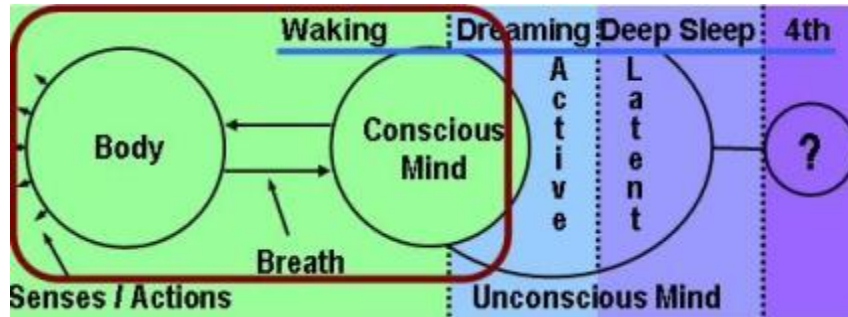
**Explanations of the 7 levels of consciousness:** Below are some explanations of each of the seven levels of consciousness mapped out in OM Mantra. As you go through the levels of the OM Mantra described below, it is best to remember that the key levels for practice are awareness of the four levels of consciousness related to "A," "U," "M," and the fourth level of Silence.

[Note: It is very useful to remember that, when describing or reading about subtle levels of consciousness, words are inadequate, and can easily seem to be in conflict with one another, as one wrestles with varying terminology, or with explanations from one or another writer. Ultimately, it is direct experience through repeated practice, without a break, over a long time that will unravel the meaning of the explanations and bring the true insights.]

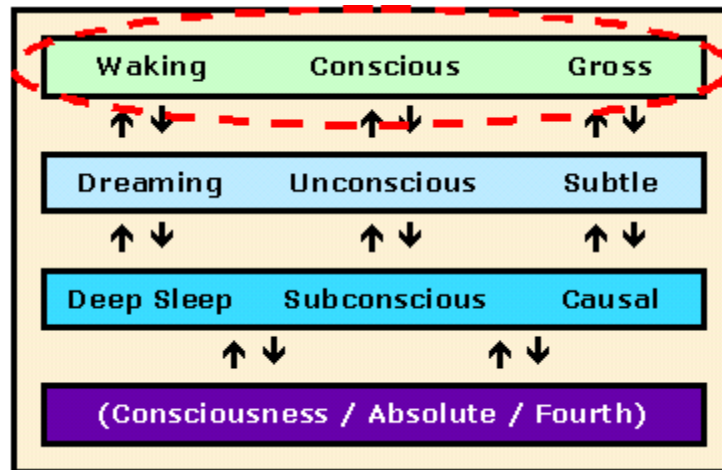
## **1. Waking / Conscious / Vaishvaanara / Gross / "A" of AUM Mantra**

---

**"A" represents Waking:** The Waking state of consciousness is represented by the "A" of the AUM Mantra. The name of this level of consciousness is *Vaishvaanara*. The Waking state (A of OM Mantra) is experienced by the individual person. In the Waking state of consciousness (A of OM Mantra) there are actions, speech, and thoughts of which we are "consciously" aware. The unconscious processes in the deeper levels (U and M of OM Mantra) are also there, but just not normally noticed.



**Microcosm and macrocosm of Waking:** If the individual person is the microcosm, then the whole of the manifest universe is the macrocosm. The "A" of AUM Mantra represents not only the individual Waking state of consciousness, but also the entire Gross realm. The individual state of Waking consciousness and the Gross realm are all operating at the same level of consciousness (both are "in the world").



**The "A" bursts forth:** When using AUM as a mantra, notice how the "A" bursts forth in an instant (whether said aloud, or thought of internally). You could say "Aaaaaaa...", in a drawn out way, but the "A" itself has a very brief, instantaneous bursting forth quality to it. The sound arises quickly, in a flash, from out of the silence. When using the OM Mantra, whether aloud or internally, it is useful to allow yourself to be aware of this bursting forth quality of thoughts, images, or impressions. All of these arise in a moment from the Subtler place within (U and M of OM Mantra).

**Three types of awareness with "A":** In the practice of remembering the AUM Mantra, when awareness is on "A" of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:

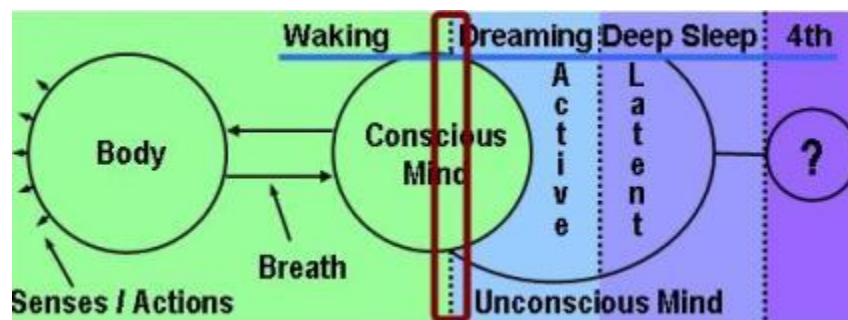
- the Waking state,
- the Conscious level of mental and emotional processing, and
- the Gross realm of the universe.

The awareness of these three operating at the same level of reality is allowed to become clearer through practice over time.

**Observing the "A" come forward:** To observe the way the "A" comes forward when remembering the OM Mantra is to observe the way our whole process of thoughts, actions, and speech arises. This can be extremely useful to understand.

## 2. Unmani / Transition between A and U of OM Mantra

**Transition between Waking and Dreaming:** There is a transition stage between Waking (A of OM Mantra) and Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) states (or between Conscious and Unconscious states). The name of this transition stage of consciousness is *Unmani*. *Unmani* does not just refer to the personal experience between Waking and Dreaming. Rather, it is the name of that transition level of consciousness itself. (Like many words, the word *Unmani* is used in different ways. In other contexts, it is also used to mean *Samadhi* or *Turiya*.)



**We have all experienced this transition:** We have all experienced this pleasant transition at times when about to awaken after a good sleep, and possibly when we are "day dreaming". In this state, you have left the Dreaming world (U of OM Mantra), but have not yet fully come into the Waking (A of OM Mantra), or external world. You might be lying there pleasantly, not remembering your name, who you are, where you are, and not really caring about these things. But you are also not asleep having any dreams.

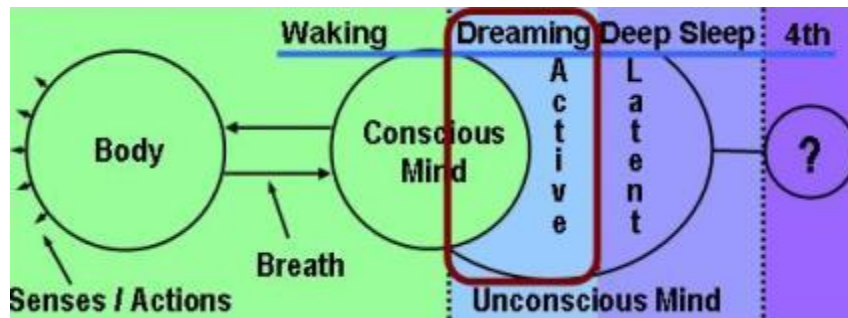
**Increasing awareness of the transitions:** When using the OM Mantra for Yoga Meditation and Contemplation, the focus is mostly on the three states of Waking (A of OM Mantra), Dreaming (U of OM Mantra), and Sleep (M of OM Mantra), which are also called the Gross, Subtle, and Causal. However, as it is practiced, there also will be a natural, increasing awareness of the transition phases as well. It will become clearer how it is that conscious (A of OM Mantra) thoughts, speech, and actions are transitioning from their underlying, mostly unconscious (U and M of OM Mantra) thought and emotional processes.

**Don't confuse this transition with Meditation:** This very pleasant state is often confused with Meditation. Meditation is done in the Waking state (A of OM Mantra), in which one is full awake and alert. Then, gradually the veil is opened to allow the deeper states or levels (U of OM Mantra) to come forward into the Conscious, Waking state of awareness (A of OM Mantra).

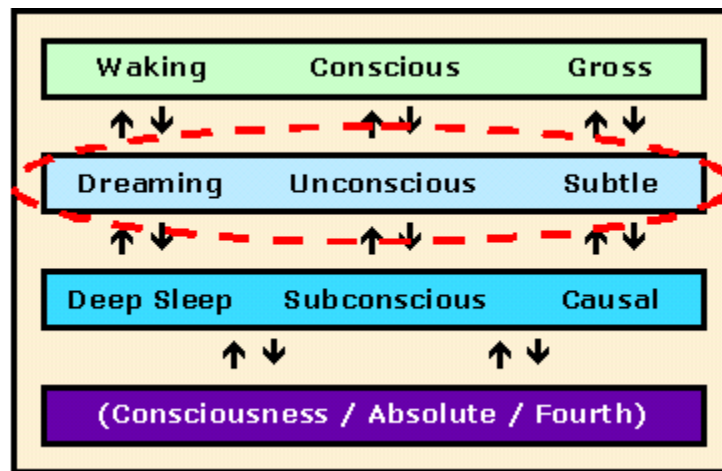
**Parallels with science:** In relation to the Gross world (A of OM Mantra), it is interesting to note the parallels between the transition between Unconscious and Conscious thought patterns, and the way the scientists describe the coming forth of the manifest universe as a "big bang". Possibly this too is a form of the coming forth of the Subtle (U of OM Mantra), transitioning into the Gross (A of OM Mantra).

### 3. Dreaming / Unconscious / Taijasa / Subtle / "U" of AUM Mantra

**"U" represents Dreaming:** The Dreaming state of consciousness is represented by the "U" of the AUM Mantra. The name of this level of consciousness is *Taijasa* (U of OM Mantra). *Taijasa* does not just mean dreaming. Rather, it is the name of that level of consciousness in which dreaming occurs (U of OM Mantra).



**Mind working out its desires:** The Dreaming state (U of OM Mantra) is a level where the mind can work out its unfulfilled wants, wishes, desires, attractions, and aversions not allowed to play out in the external world (A of OM Mantra). Both Yogis and psychologists speak of this as a useful process.



**Uncoloring thought patterns:** However, the Yogi will go further in dealing with the underlying deep impressions (Samskaras) that lead to actions (Karmas). The Yogi wants to turn those colored (*klishhta*) thought patterns uncolored (*aklishhta*) thought patterns so that they no longer need to arise and cause disturbance, whether causing that disturbance in the Waking (A of OM Mantra) or Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) states of consciousness (See also the article on [Klishhta and Aklishhta Thoughts](#)). It is for this reason that the Yogi gradually and naturally needs less sleep; there are fewer colored (*klishhta*) unconscious thought patterns needing to play out. (See Yoga Sutras 1.5, 2.1-2.9, and 2.10-2.11 on coloring and uncoloring)

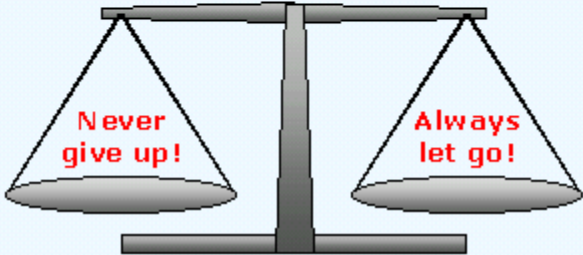
**Microcosm and macrocosm of Dreaming:** The counterpart of the personal Dream world (U of OM Mantra) is the entire Subtle, psychic, occult, or astral plane of reality (also U of OM Mantra). One is the microcosm, while the other is the macrocosm.

**Lifting the veil:** As one progresses in Yoga Meditation, opening to the Unconscious (U of OM Mantra) begins. One stays in the Waking state (A of OM Mantra), but gradually lifts the veil, opens the curtain, so that the Unconscious (U of OM Mantra) begins to come forward. What comes is that which was normally only accessible in the Dreaming state (U of OM Mantra).

**Intentionally letting the thoughts come:** It is in this field of observation that the Yogi does the Meditation of remaining one-pointed by letting go of the thought patterns arising. "Let them come, and let them go," is the message the Yogi says to the mind, as Non-Attachment (Vairagya) becomes a reality, not just an act done in the external world. (See Yoga Sutras 1.12-1.16 on non-attachment)

**Practice and Non-Attachment**

**Abhyasa** and **Vairagya** are two of the most important foundation principles of Yoga. Abhyasa means practice and Vairagya means non-attachment. Balancing these two companions is a key to spiritual life, allowing one to pursue the subtler meditation practices.



**Abhyasa** involves cultivating a strong conviction, a persistent effort to consistently choose practices with actions, speech, and thoughts that lead in the direction of a stable tranquility (sthitau).

**Vairagya** involves learning to actively and systematically encounter, explore and let go of the many attachments, aversions, fears, and false identities that are clouding the true Self.

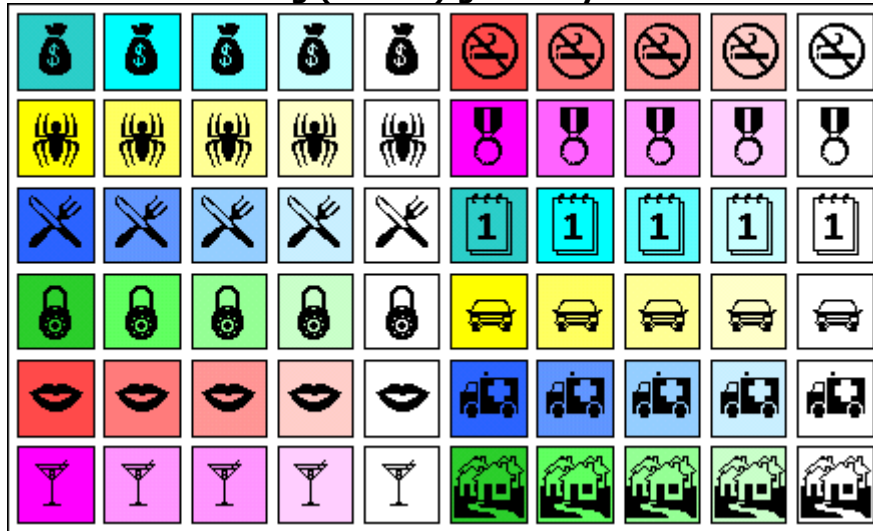
**They work together:** Practice leads you in the right direction, while non-attachment allows you to continue the inner journey without getting sidetracked into the pains and pleasures along the way.

(See Yoga Sutras 1.12-1.16)

SwamiJ.com

**The highest therapy:** Gradually, the intensity of the coloring [attenuates](#), eventually allowing the thought pattern to remain in latent, seed form (until it is dispensed with entirely). It is because of this process of attenuating that the Yogi says that Yoga Meditation is the highest of all therapies. (See Yoga Sutra 2.4 on attenuation)

**The coloring (klisha) gradually attenuates**



**Tajjasa is not the "spiritual" realm:** This level of *Tajjasa* (U of OM Mantra) has often been confused as being the "spiritual" realm, failing to note that it is only the second of four levels of consciousness in AUM Mantra (or third of the seven). If one is not familiar with this, it can seem that there are only two realms (a Gross and Spiritual) with a Transition between them. One can easily get caught in a trap of pursuing the actions, beings, and objects of the Subtle realm (U of OM Mantra), not recognizing that they are merely a level to move through, not a place to go and stay. Journeys in these subtle realms (U of OM Mantra) are no more useful in the journey of Self-realization than journeys to a thousand cities in our external world (A of OM Mantra), though some such journeying is sometimes needed so as to learn the lesson that the journeying is not needed. The article [Realization Beyond the Gross and Subtle](#) describes how it can *seem* that there are only two levels of Gross and Subtler.

**Seeking the Subtle is a distraction:** Patanjali, codifier of Yoga science describes many siddhis (powers) that come to the Yogi through practices. Some say that the Yogi is seeking these powers intentionally. However, Patanjali actually mentions these on the foundation of Non-Attachment (Vairagya) and Discrimination (Viveka), such that the seeker will abandon these powers when they come (See Yoga Sutra 3.38). In other words, seeking of the breadth of the Subtle realm (U of OM Mantra) is a distraction on the journey to enlightenment; with Discriminative Wisdom and Non-Attachment, one is better off to let go of these allurements.

**Witnessing and going beyond:** At the same time that the Yogi observes and lets go of the Subtle realm (U of OM Mantra), there is also a beauty in [witnessing](#) as one moves forward in the journey. We can surely enjoy the scenery along the way, though it may be best, the Yogis remind us, to move on to the Realization of the Absolute, which is not subject to death, decay, or decomposition.

**Awareness of the transition:** In the practice of remembering the OM Mantra, one allows the awareness and feeling associated with the "A" to transition into the awareness and feeling associated with the "U".

**Three types of awareness with "U":** In the practice of remembering the AUM Mantra, when awareness is on "U" of the OM Mantra, you cultivate and train yourself to have a simultaneous awareness of:

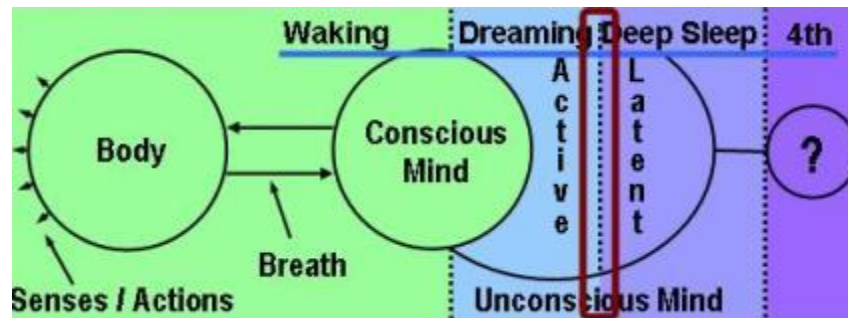
- the Dreaming state,
- the Unconscious processing level of the mind, and
- the Subtle realm of the universe (Dreaming, Unconscious, and Subtle are all at the same level).

The awareness of these three operating at the same level of reality (U of OM Mantra) is allowed to become clearer through practice over time.

**Forming the sound of "U":** The actual sound is not like the letter "A" and the letter "U," but is more like "AOOUUUUU..." There is "Ah," followed by "UUUUU..." (as in shOE). Then there is "MMMMM..." leading to Silence.

## 4. Aladani / Transition between U and M of OM Mantra

**Transition between Dreaming and Deep Sleep:** There is a transition stage between Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) and Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra) states. The name of this transition stage of consciousness is *Aladani*. *Aladani* does not just refer to the personal experience between Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) and Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra). Rather, it is the name of that transition level of consciousness itself.



**This transition is not normally experienced consciously:** This is a state that one normally does *not* experience consciously. This state is very subtle. It is a transition (as is *Unmani*, between Waking and Dreaming, as described above), but is the transition whereby the latent, *formless* facts or impressions start to stir, and *end up taking form* in the Unconscious mind (U of OM Mantra), that part normally only accessed when one is having dreams while in the Dream state of sleep (U of OM Mantra).

One may sometimes consciously experience the transition between Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) and Waking (A of OM Mantra), either while in bed at sleeping time or at Meditation time. This might be experienced as very beautiful or very horrifying, depending on the nature of the thought patterns. However, the transition at *Aladani* is very different from the Waking (A of OM Mantra) to Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) transition.

**Thoughts in their formless form:** Here, in the *Aladani* transition, the thought patterns that are in their *unmanifest, formless, latent* form start to stir. This is literally the beginnings of the enlivening of latent Samskaras, the source of our Karma (the word Karma literally means "actions"). It is a process that one is not normally conscious of. Once again, it is very important to note that this is *not* the

same as the process whereby Unconscious active mental process springs forward through *Unmani* into the Waking or Conscious state; this is happening at a deeper level.

**Beyond the Gross and Subtle:** As attractive as the Gross and Subtle realm can be, these levels *beyond Taijasa* (the Dream State or Subtle realm) can be even more alluring and distracting. As one touches on this transition phase from which the Subtle realm and Subtle thoughts are born, one starts to see the way in which both the subtle and material realm are manifested and can be manipulated.

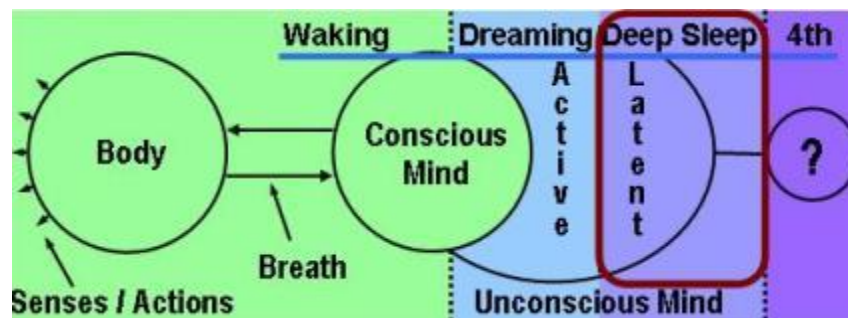
**Aladani and Aladin's lamp:** Notice the similarity between the names of the level of consciousness called *Aladani* and the story of Aladin's lamp, wherein there was a genie. The genie was in latent form, but by rubbing the lamp, a transition process begins whereby the genie comes forth to fulfill any wishes. Between the stage of the genie being inside the lamp, and being fully formed, the transition of the genie is that of smoke that changes and solidifies into form.

**Moving past this transition level:** For one truly on the path of Self-realization, this is a level to be acknowledged and moved past, allowing the stirrings to fall back to rest so that the Absolute can be experienced.

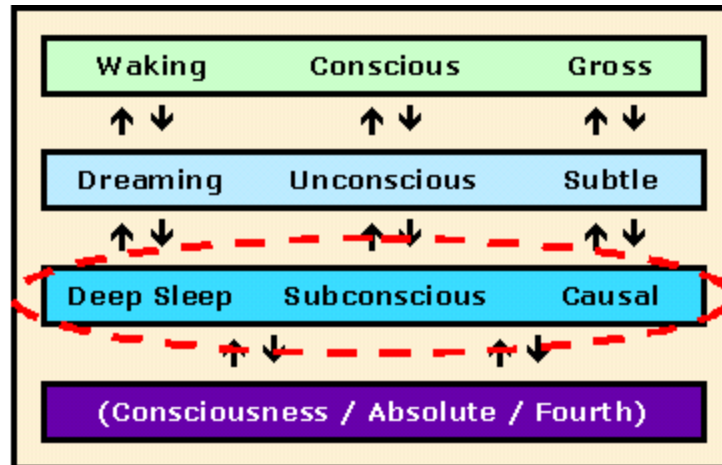
## 5. Deep Sleep / Subconscious / Prajna / Causal / "M" of AUM Mantra

---

**"M" represents Deep Sleep:** The Deep Sleep state of consciousness is represented by the "M" of the AUM Mantra. The name of this level of consciousness is *Prajna*. *Prajna* does not just mean Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra). Rather, it is the name of that level of consciousness in which one experiences Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra).



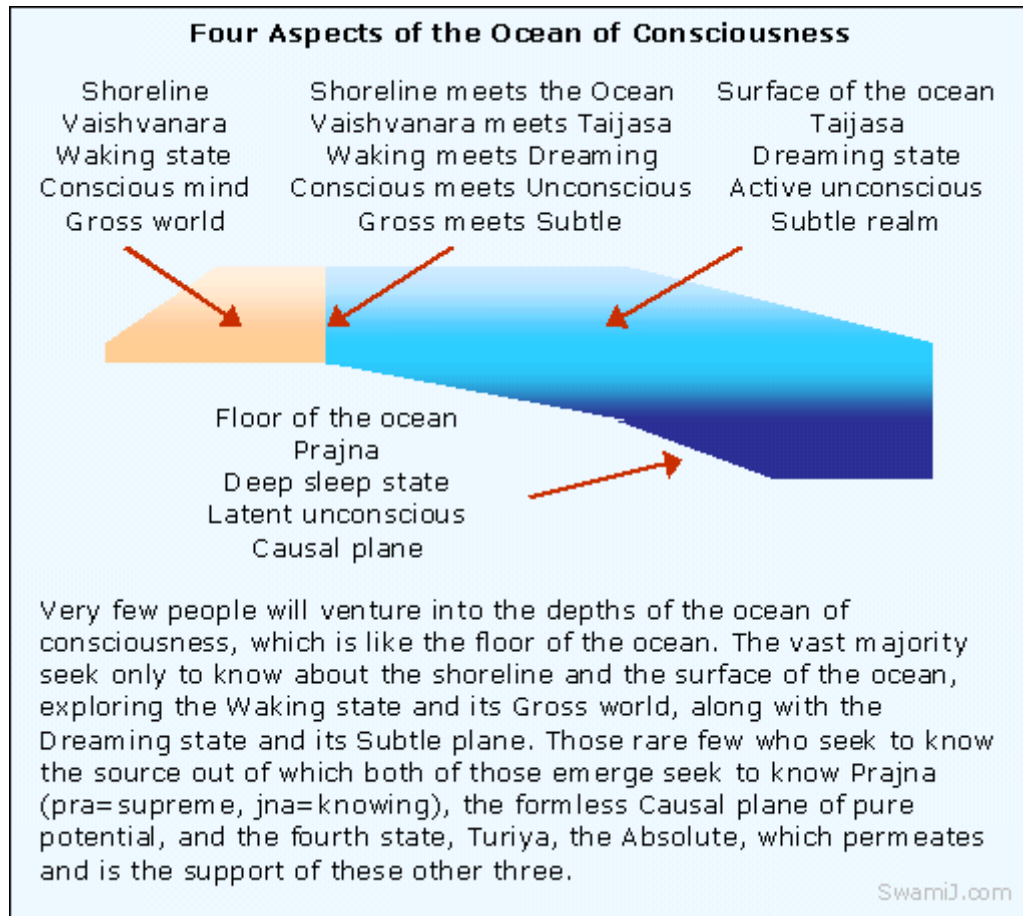
**Impressions are stored in their latent form:** The Deep Sleep state (M of OM Mantra) is the level where deep impressions are stored in their latent form. It contains the roots of our habit patterns, the Samskaras that are the driving force behind Karma (actions). Those wants, wishes, desires, attractions, and aversions that play themselves out in dreams (U of OM Mantra), or turn into actions and speech in the external world (A of OM Mantra) have their root in this level of consciousness. Those impressions are like seeds, lying there waiting for water and fertilizer to awaken them, so they may grow in the fields of Dreaming (U of OM Mantra) or Waking (A of OM Mantra).



**Prajna is supreme knowledge:** "Pra" means "Supreme" and "Jna" comes from "Jnana," which means "Knowledge". Thus, *Prajna* (M of OM Mantra) is the level of consciousness that is of Supreme Knowledge (M of OM Mantra). How odd it is, that the domain of Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra), where there seems to be nothing going on, is called the place of Supreme Knowledge.

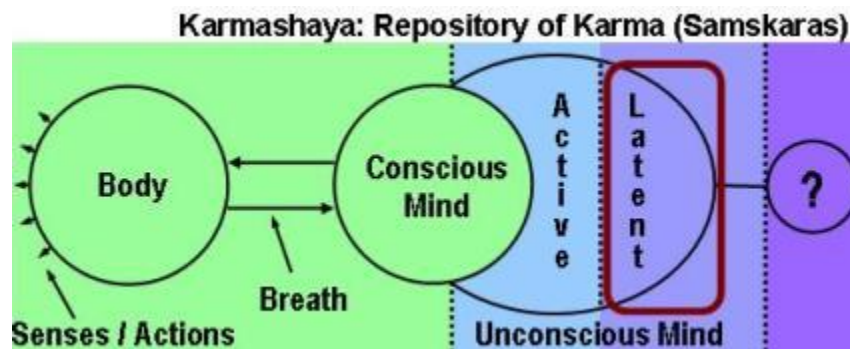
**Prior to the creation of thoughts and emotions:** However, *Prajna* (OM of OM Mantra) is the place, the level that is *deeper than, or prior to* the creation of thoughts and emotions, whether in the Dream (Unconscious; U of OM Mantra) level or the Waking (Conscious; A of OM Mantra) level.

**Prior to the manifestation of Gross and Subtle:** It is also the domain that is *deeper than, or prior to* creation or manifestation (M of OM Mantra) of the objects and activities within both the Subtle (U of OM Mantra) and Gross (A of OM Mantra) realms. (The phrase "prior to" is not meaning in the sense of time. Rather, it is that out of which the next thing emerges. A metaphor sometimes used is the way that a pot comes out of clay. Here, the clay is always there. Out of the clay emerges the pot, and although the clay never goes away, the pot will go away, and merge back into the clay from which it came.)



**Infinite library of wisdom:** One who begins to gain access to this *Prajna* level (M of OM Mantra) also begins to gain access to what has been called the Infinite Library of Wisdom. This means direct experience of knowing, not merely from some form of contact with the Subtle realm (U of OM Mantra), but with the level out of which that Subtle realm arises.

**Storage and altering of samskaras:** In this level of *Prajna* (the level of Deep Sleep; M of OM Mantra) is the storage of the formless, latent thought patterns (formless forms) called Samskaras that drive Karma, or action (A of OM Mantra). If one can gain access to the Samskaras (M of OM Mantra) while they are in this latent form, they can be more readily altered such a way that they lose their potency.



**Making samskaras mere memories:** Then, having lost their power (or reduced it substantially), the deep habit patterns, or Samskaras (M of OM Mantra), can no longer bind one to what would otherwise automatically drive actions, speech, and thoughts. Now, those deep impressions (M of OM Mantra) have become mere memories with little or no power. It is like a rope that before could bind, but that has now been burned. Though maybe still having the shape of a rope, it has lost its ability to bind. (This process is definitely not one of psychological suppression or repression.)

**Gaining direct access to the samskaras:** There are a variety of techniques that professional and lay people use at the Waking level (A of OM Mantra) to indirectly affect changes in these deep impressions. Some of these can be very useful to spiritual aspirants in their journey. However, the Yogis want *direct* access to these deep impressions (M of OM Mantra) so that they can *choose* their own deep habit patterns. In this way, the Yogi gradually becomes a master over the Samskaras (M of OM Mantra) leading to his or her own thoughts, speech, and actions.

**Burning away the colorings:** For the Yogi, this is a process of dealing with the roots of habits *directly*, through Yoga Meditation, Contemplation, and [Yoga Nidra](#) (described below). While the Yogi definitely cultivates the creation of new habit patterns, it is not merely pasting on another layer of habits on the top of the old, whereby one is left with inner conflict between the old and the new habits or Samskaras (that can play out unconsciously into actions and speech, as well as inner turmoil). The Yogi wants to attenuate and then burn away the colorings of fears, aversions, attractions, egoism, and spiritual ignorance (M of OM Mantra).

**Microcosm and macrocosm of Deep Sleep:** These personal latent impressions or Samskaras are the microcosm, while the macrocosm is the Causal plane (M of OM Mantra) from which creation of the entire Subtle (U of OM Mantra) and and Gross (A of OM Mantra) universe emerges. This is why it is called the "Causal" realm or level of reality (M of OM Mantra). Those with great access to this level are sometimes revered, although even this attainment is short of the Self-realization that comes with the realization of *Turiya*, the Absolute Reality (Silent aspect of OM Mantra). The Yogis suggest that the aspirant turn away even from the allurements of the offer of such creative powers, and instead walk in the pursuit of the Highest Realization.

**Three types of awareness with "M":** In the practice of remembering the AUM Mantra, when awareness is on "M," you cultivate and train yourself to have awareness of:

- the Deep Sleep state,
- the Subconscious (latent, dormant, inactive, storage) aspects of mind (from where the impetus for Karma, or actions springs forth), and
- the Causal realm, out of which arises the Subtle and Gross universe (they are all at the same level).

The awareness of these three operating at the same level of reality (M of OM Mantra) is allowed to become clearer through practice over time.

**Prajna and Yoga Nidra:** This level of Deep Sleep (M of OM Mantra), or *Prajna*, is the level at which [Yoga Nidra](#), or Yogic Sleep is directed (Some incorrectly believe that [Yoga Nidra](#) is directed towards the transition level of *Unmani*, #2 above. That is only an early experience on the way to true [Yoga Nidra](#)).

In Yoga Meditation and Contemplation, one remains in the Conscious, Waking state (A of OM Mantra), and gradually allows that Waking state to *expand through* the other states that are normally

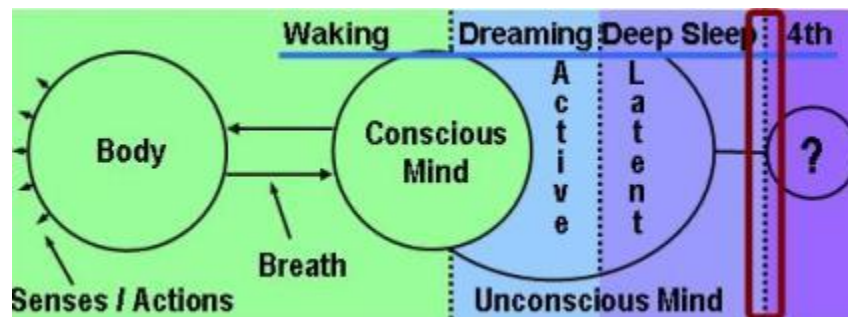
unconscious. However, in [Yoga Nidra](#) one *leaves* the Waking state, descends to the Deep Sleep state (M of OM Mantra), and yet, paradoxically, brings along Waking consciousness.

**Reducing samskaras through Yoga Nidra:** [Yoga Nidra](#) is a state which allows one to experience thought patterns directly in their latent, hidden, or formless forms, and thus be able to reduce their power to play out due to habit. The phenomena itself of reducing the power of the Samskaras comes about naturally through the deep process of introspection during [Yoga Nidra](#). That level of consciousness is the M of OM Mantra.

## 6. Samadhi / Deep Absorption

---

**Beyond Waking, Dreaming, and Deep Sleep:** Beyond, or below Waking, Dreaming, and Deep Sleep (the A, U, and M of OM Mantra) is the state of deep absorption, that is the stage to which one's Meditation practice next leads. It is called *Samadhi*.



**Many types of Samadhi:** There are many forms of *Samadhi*. An even cursory review of the texts will reveal dozens of different types. Mostly, these differences have to do with the nature of the object on which one was meditating before dropping into the state of *Samadhi* with that object.

**Meditation on Gross or Subtle:** The Object on which one is meditating (and then enters *Samadhi*) may be Gross or Subtle. A simple example will help. If one is internally meditating on the image of a red rose, that object is a Gross object (the A of OM Mantra). Meditation may shift away from the red flower to the red color alone, the "redness". However, even that is still a Gross object of sorts. However, if attention shifts to light itself, or to the ability to see light, those are subtler (the U of OM Mantra). If attention shifts deeper to the observer who is doing the observing, or to the blissful feeling that comes from the absorption, then these are still subtler. However, in any case there is still an "object," although that object may be extremely subtle.

Similarly, Meditation on a spiritual or religious object will also move through levels of experience, from Gross to Subtle, to Subtler, and to Subtle-most (the A, U, and M of OM Mantra). Eventually the inward shifting of attention reveals the essence of the object of Meditation and *Samadhi*.

**Observer, observing, and observed collapse into one:** In Meditation on an object, whether Gross or Subtle, there are three parts: 1) An Observer, 2) A Process of Observing, and 3) The Object being observed. With *Samadhi*, it is as if these three parts collapse into only one. There is no longer an observer observing the observed; rather, there seems to be only the object. It is as if the observer and the process of observing have become absorbed into the object, such that object is the only thing left.

**Samadhi with, or without form:** There are two general categories of *Samadhi*. One is *Samadhi* "with form" or "with object" (of which there are many types of gross or subtle objects, and thus many types of *Samadhi*). During Meditation, attention was directed towards this form or object, and in *Samadhi*, the attention becomes absorbed into that form or object.

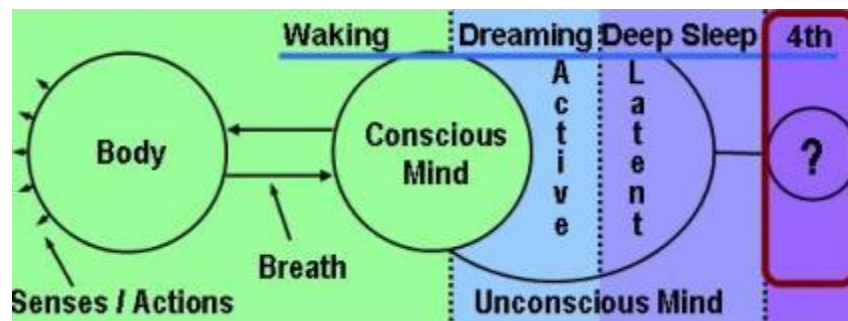
The other category is *Samadhi* "without form" or "without object," in which there is attention that is not directed towards any form or object (since it is without any object or form, there is not the diversity of types of *Samadhi*, as is the case with *Samadhi* on form or object).

In both categories of *Samadhi*, the attention stance is similar. The difference is that in the case of objectless or formless *Samadhi*, there is no object. The stance of attention is still there, but the object is not. It is somewhat as if during *Samadhi* with form, one had simply forgotten the object, and thus came into objectless *Samadhi*.

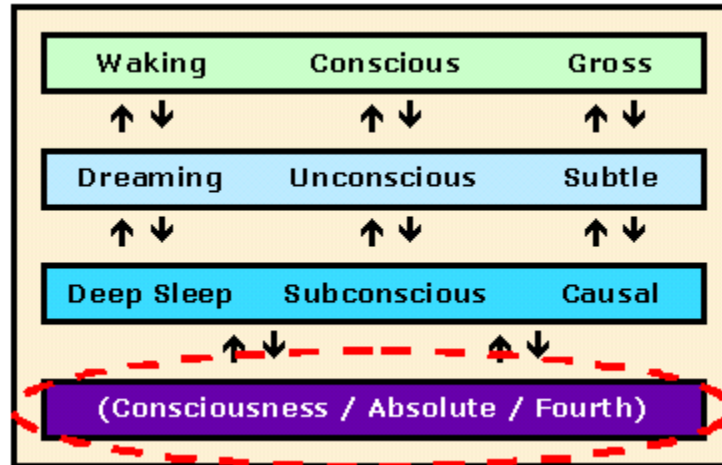
**Cultivating Practice and Non-attachment:** For one who does not get trapped by the activity of the Gross world, the Subtle realm, or even the stirrings of the formless Causal level, then the state of absorption called *Samadhi* is within reach. Attaining *Samadhi* rests on two foundation principles, Practice and Non-Attachment, *Abhyasa* and *Vairagya*.

## 7. Turiya / Consciousness / Absolute / Silence after AUM

**Silence represents the permeating consciousness:** After the "A," the "U," and the "M" of the OM Mantra there is Silence that is representative of the consciousness that permeates, and *is* all of the other levels. The name of this level of consciousness is *Turiya*. (All other mantras merge into the vibration of OM, and in turn, to this Silence.)



**Turiya means "the fourth":** *Turiya* literally means "the fourth," and represents that consciousness which permeates, observes, and *is* the other three levels. To call *Turiya* a "level" is not really accurate, since it is always, in fact, witness of, and at one with, the other states.



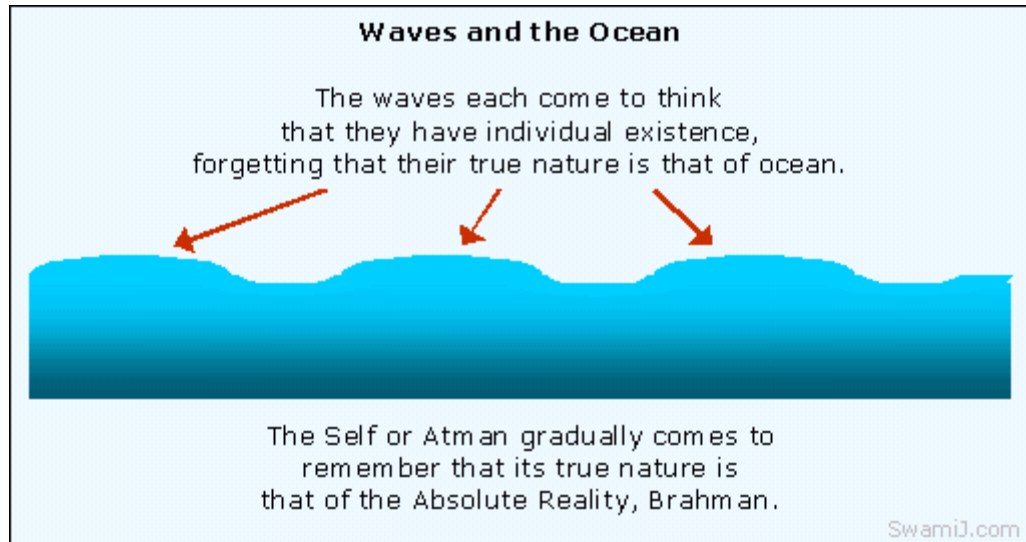
**Standing on the roof of the building:** From the vantage point of *Turiya*, one sees the entire panorama of the play of the levels of consciousness. It has been likened to standing on the roof of a three floor building, where the first three floors are the Waking, Dreaming, and Deep Sleep states (Gross, Subtle, Causal levels) . From those levels, you can only look out a window, whereas from the roof you can see it all.

**Practicing the AUM Mantra:** The AUM Mantra represents the four states of Waking, Dreaming, Deep Sleep, and the fourth state of *Turiya*. These four are the focus of attention in remembering the OM Mantra. The Transition states and the *Samadhi* state are less focused on with intention during the practice. This does not mean they are not there, or will not be experienced, but simply that one not making specific use of them in Meditation and Contemplation. In practicing the OM Mantra, the emphasis is on the "A," the "U," the "M," and the Silence, along with their associated realities.

**Practice with the Silence after AUM:** In the practice of remembering the AUM Mantra, when awareness is on the Silence after the "A," the "U," and the "M," you cultivate and train yourself to have an awareness of that consciousness, and that it:

- Permeates all of the personal levels of Waking, Dreaming, Deep Sleep
- Permeates all of the Subtle realm
- Permeates all of the Causal realm

Consciousness permeates, is the foundation of, and in fact, *is* the whole of the levels of the "A," the "U," and the "M" levels. This awareness is allowed to become clearer through practice, over time.



**Merging into stillness and silence:** Many sages, teachers, and traditions have pointed out that eventually all light, sound and mantras lead to Stillness and Silence. By understanding the meaning of AUM and OM Mantra, and the levels of consciousness that it represents, it becomes much easier to see how it is that light, sound and mantras truly do merge back into the Stillness and Silence from which they arose.

**The meaning of AUM is revealed:** The masters, sages, teachers, and traditions have also pointed out that to really understand this, one must do the practices and go to the Stillness and Silence oneself, wherein the meaning of AUM Mantra is revealed.

I am a Wave in the Ocean of Bliss.  
I and the Ocean are One.  
I am Ocean.  
I am That.

**Distinction between Samadhi and Turiya:** There is a fine distinction between *Samadhi* and *Turiya*. *Samadhi* is a dualistic style of attention, while *Turiya* is non-dualistic, leading one to the experience "I am That," or Self-realization. There are many *objects* on which one can practice Yoga Meditation and enter *Samadhi*, and there are Gross, Subtle, and Subtler *levels* of objects in which one might attain *Samadhi*, as well as objectless *Samadhi*.

However, *Turiya* brings one to Self-realization that, "I am a Wave in the Ocean of Bliss; I and the Ocean are One; I am Ocean; I am That".

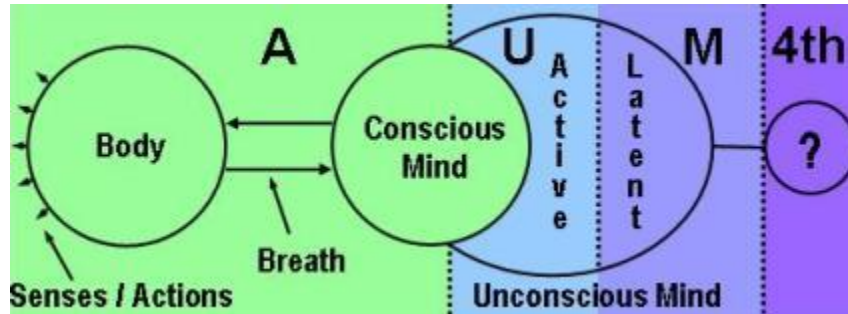
## **Mandukya Upanishad: 12 Verses on AUM Mantra**

---

The pinnacle of the wisdom of the ancient sages is contained in the terse twelve verses of the Mandukya Upanishad, which outlines the philosophy and practices of the OM mantra (written as either AUM or OM). It has been said that the wisdom of the ancient sages is in the four books of the ancient most text the Vedas, the juice of the Vedas is in the Upanishads, and the juice of the Upanishads is in

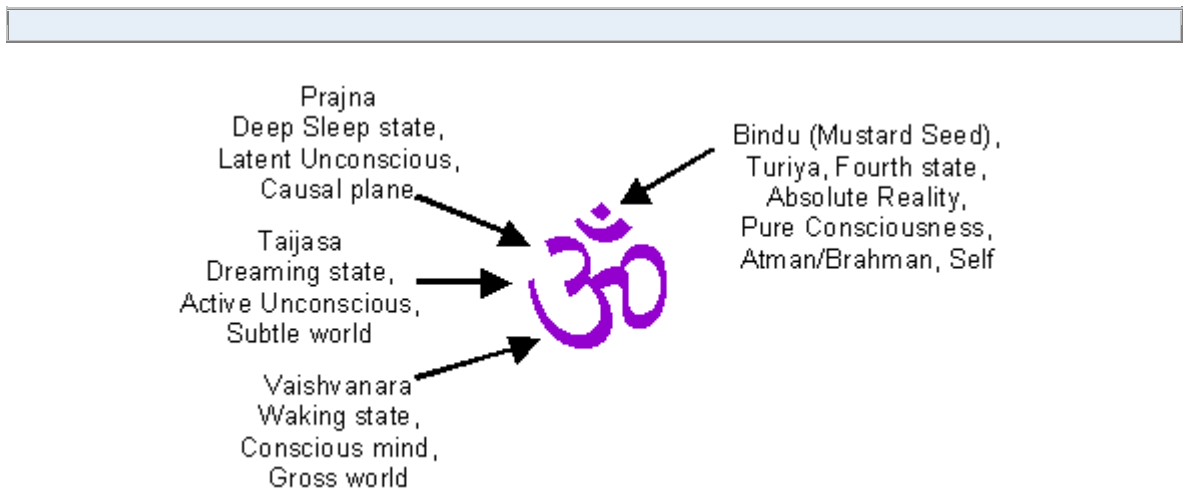
the Mandukya Upanishad. The entire subject of Mandukya Upanishad is AUM Mantra. It has also been widely said that if one understands and practices Mandukya Upanishad, no other teachings are needed. While nobody is likely to do that, the statement is a clear comment on the strength of this wisdom and practice.

OM Mantra is also suggested as a direct route to samadhi in the Yoga Sutras (See Yoga Sutras [1.23-1.29](#)).



[Mandukya Upanishad on Om Mantra: Yoga Vedanta Meditation](#)

The teachings of the Mandukya Upanishad and OM Mantra are well worth deep study, discussion, reflection and contemplation. By faithfully and intently engaging these twelve verses, all of the other written and oral teachings can be explored as expansions of the foundation principles and practices encapsulated in this succinct summary. The OM Mantra is a roadmap of the entire process of sadhana and a most practical tool for Self-Realization. To have such a terse summary as the centerpiece of practices, it makes the context of all other practices significantly easier to understand and actually do. It is not only a most insightful writing, but also a complete outline for sadhana, enlightenment practices.

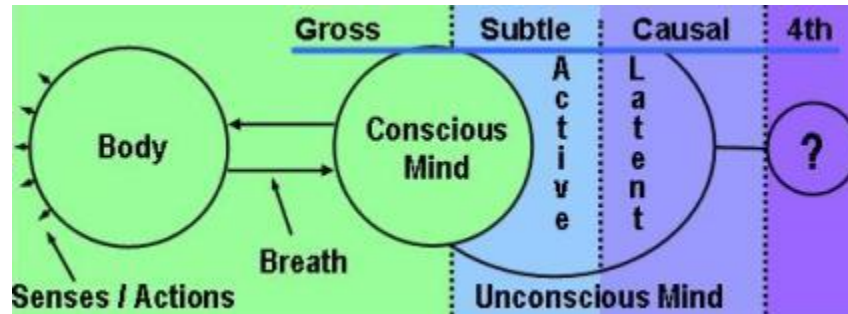


Verses 1-2 describe the Self and the Absolute.  
 Verses 3-7 explain the four levels of consciousness.  
 Verses 8-12 outline the four aspects of AUM.

## The Self and the Absolute (1-2):

1) Hari Om. Om-ity-etad-aksharam-idam sarvam, tasyopavyākhyānam bhūtam bhavad bhavishyaditi sarvam-omkāra eva. Yaccānyat trikālātītam tadapy omkāra eva.

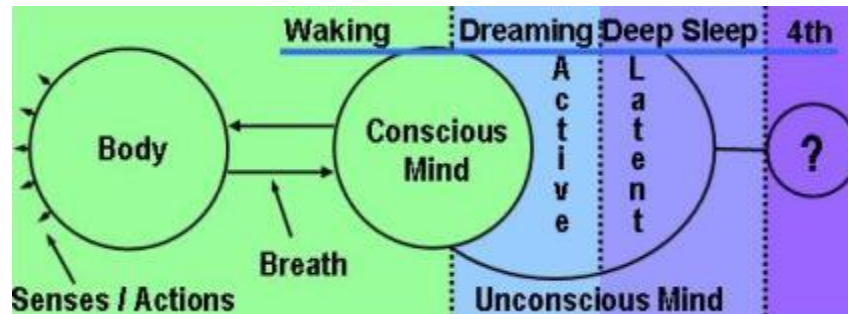
**All is OM:** Hari Om. The whole universe is the syllable Om. Following is the exposition of Om. Everything that was, is, or will be is, in truth Om. All else which transcends time, space, and causation is also Om.



2) Sarvam hyetad brahmāyam-ātmā brahma soyamātmā catuspāt.

**Atman has Four Aspects:** All of this, everywhere, is in truth Brahman, the Absolute Reality. This very Self itself, Atman, is also Brahman, the Absolute Reality. This Atman or Self has four aspects through which it operates.

## Four Levels of Consciousness (3-7):



3) Jāgarita-sthāno bahish-prājñahsaptānga ekonavimsatimukhah sthūla-bhug vaiśvānarah prathamah pādah.

**First is Waking / Gross:** The first aspect of Atman is the Self in the Waking state, Vaishvanara. In this first state, consciousness is turned outward to the external world. Through its seven instruments\* and nineteen channels\* it experiences the gross objects of the phenomenal world.

4) Svapna-sthāno'ntah-prājñah saptānga ekonavimsatimukhah praviviktabhuk tajaso dvitīyah pādah.

**Second is Dreaming / Subtle:** The second aspect of Atman is the Self in the Dreaming state, Taijasa. In this second state, consciousness is turned towards the inner world. It also operates

through seven instruments and nineteen channels, which engage the subtle objects of the mental realm.

5) Yatra supto na kancana kāmam kāmāyate na kancana svapnam pasyati tat sushuptam. Sushupta-āsthāna ekibhūtah prajñānaghana evānandamayo hyānandabhuk chetomukhah prājnastrityah pādah.

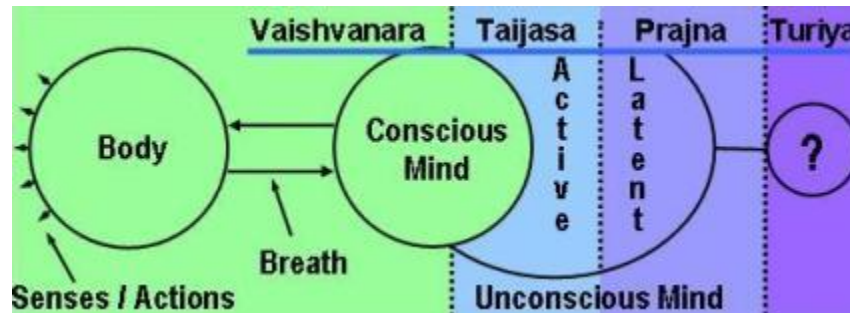
**Third is Deep Sleep / Causal:** The third aspect of Atman is the Self operating in the Deep Sleep state, Prajna. In this third state, there is neither the desire for any gross or subtle object, nor any dream sequences. In deep sleep, all such experiences have receded or merged into the ground of undifferentiated consciousness. Here, one is filled with the experience of bliss, and can also find the way to clearer knowledge of the two preceding states.

6) Esha sarvesvara esha sarvajña esho'ntaryāmy- esha yonih sarvasya prabhavāpyayau hi bhūtānām.

**Find the Experiencer:** The one who experiences all of these states of consciousness is the omniscient, indwelling source and director of all. This one is the womb out of which all of the other emerge. All things originate from and dissolve back into this source.

7) Nantah-prājñam na bahih-prājñam, nobhayatah-prājñam na prājñana-ghanam na prājñam naprajñam. Adrishtam-avyavahārayam-agrāhyam- alakshanam-acintyam-avyapadesyam-ekātma-pratyayasāram, prapancopasarnam santam sivam-advaitam caturtham manyante sa tm sa vijneyah.

**The Fourth Aspect is Turiya:** The fourth aspect of Atman or Self is Turiya, literally the fourth. In this fourth state, consciousness is neither turned outward nor inward. Nor is it both outward and inward; it is beyond both cognition and the absence of cognition. This fourth state of Turiya cannot be experienced through the senses or known by comparison, deductive reasoning or inference; it is indescribable, incomprehensible, and unthinkable with the mind. This is Pure Consciousness itself. This is the real Self. It is within the cessation of all phenomena. It is serene, tranquil, filled with bliss, and is one without second. This is the real or true Self that is to be realized.

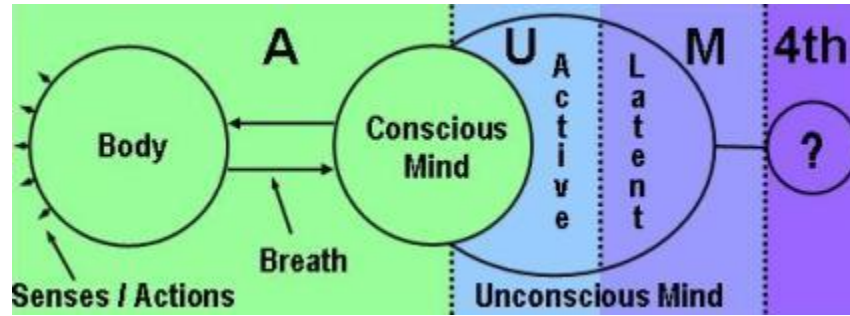


#### Four Aspects of AUM (8-12):

8) So'yam-ātmā adhyaksharam-omkaro dhimātram pādā mātṛā mātṛāscā pādā akāra ukāro makāra iti.

**Those Four are the Same with "A-U-M" and Silence:** That Om, though described as having four states, is indivisible; it is pure Consciousness itself. That Consciousness is Om Mantra. The three sounds A-U-M (ah, ou, mm) and the three letters A, U, M are identical with the three states of waking,

dreaming, and sleeping, and these three states are identical with the three sounds and letters. The fourth state, Turiya is to be realized only in the silence behind or beyond the other three.



9) Jagarita-sthāno vaiśvānaro'kārah prathamā mātrā. āpterādimatvād-vāpnoti ha vai sarvān kāmānādisca bhavati ya evam veda.

**The Sound "A" is Waking / Gross:** Vaishvanara is the consciousness experienced during the waking state, and is *A*, the first letter of Om Mantra. That simple sound of *A* is first and permeates all other sounds. One who is aware of this first level of reality has fulfillment of all longings and is successful.

10) Svapna-stāhnas taijasa ukāro dvitīyā mātrotkarshādu-ubhayatvād- votkarsāti ha vai jñāna-santatim samānasca bhavati nāsyābrahmavit kule bhavati ya evam veda.

**The Sound "U" is Dreaming / Subtle:** Taijasa is the consciousness experienced during the dreaming state, and is *U*, the second letter of Om Mantra. This intermediate state operates between the waking and sleeping states, reflecting some qualities of the other two. One who knows this subtler state is superior to others. For one who knows this, knowers of Brahman, the Absolute Reality, will be born into his family.

11) Sushupta-sthnaḥ prājño makras tritīya mtr miterapīter va minoti ha va idam sarvam-apītisca bhavati ya evam veda.

**The Sound "M" is Deep Sleep / Causal:** Prajna is the consciousness experienced during the state of dreamless, deep sleep, and is *M*, the third letter of Om Mantra. It contains the other two, and is that from which the other two emerge, and into they recede or merge. A knower of this more subtle state can understand all within himself.

12) Amātras-caturtho'vyavahāryah prapancopasamah sivo'dvaita evamomkara ātmaiva samvisaty-ātman-ātmānam ya evam veda.

**Silence after "A-U-M" is the True Self:** The fourth aspect is the soundless aspect of Om Mantra. It is not utterable and is not comprehended through the senses or by the mind. With the cessation of all phenomena, even of bliss, this soundless aspect becomes known. It is a state of nondual (advaita) reality—one without a second. This fourth state, Turiya, is the real Self or true Self. One with direct experience of this expands to Universal Consciousness.

\*Twenty-Six Principles (from verses 3-4):

The seven instruments are the more macrocosmic instruments, while the nineteen channels relate more to the microcosmic, individual person.

**Seven Instruments:** First, Consciousness manifests outward as space, air, fire, water, and earth, along with the individuation from the whole and the flow of energy (which we know as the pulsing impulse towards breath).

**Nineteen Channels:** Then, the individual operates through the four functions of mind (aspects of antahkarana, the inner instrument), which are manas, chitta, ahamkara, and buddhi. Those four operate through the five pranas (prana, apana, samana, udana, and vyana), the five active senses or indriyas (karmendriyas of eliminating, procreating, moving, grasping, and speaking), and the five cognitive senses (jnanendriyas of smelling, tasting, seeing, touching, and hearing)

**These are explored in meditation and contemplation:** All of these seven instruments and nineteen channels are the *means* by which the Self or Atman operates in the external world, which is Vaishvanara, the subject of this third verse of the Mandukya Upanishad. It is extremely useful, if not essential, to understand and remember these twenty-six principles, instruments, or channels. This is not just intellectual information, but rather, is a real key to the self-observation and self-awareness practices that lead to the transcendence of all of these, and the realization of the Self. If they are not conscientiously witnessed, one can be deprived of the depths of spiritual awakening.

**Keeping it simple:** When reading about these twenty-six principles (the seven instruments and nineteen channels), it can seem *very* complicated. However, please keep in mind that the *entire* process of inner functioning is being mapped out in these principles. From that perspective, twenty-six is really not such a large number. By systematically learning about, exploring, witnessing, and transcending those few, you find yourself at the realization of the Self, the Atman, which is the goal described in other verses of the Mandukya Upanishad.

**Five elements:** The five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space are literally examined during meditation and contemplation, as well as witnessed in daily life. The five elements operate in conjunction with the lower five chakras (at subtle level they are called tanmatras, which are part of tattvas, or subtle constituents). The five elements align with, and operate from the five lower chakras, along with the ten [indriyas](#) and a seed mantra for each.

Chakra	Element	Mantra	Karmendriya	Jnanendriya
7	(consciousness)	Silence	(consciousness)	(consciousness)
6	(mind)	Om	(mind)	(mind)
5	space	Ham*	speaking	hearing
4	air	Yam*	grasping/holding	touching
3	fire	Ram*	moving	seeing
2	water	Vam*	procreating	tasting
1	earth	Lam*	eliminating	smelling

\* Pronounced like "Tom," "Mom," or "CD-ROM"

**Five pranas:** When the Prana operates in the body, it divides into five major flows called Vayus. These can be thought of as somewhat like major currents in one of the large oceans of the world, while there may be thousands of smaller currents. These five Vayus are the major currents that

contain thousands of smaller currents. The five are literally witnessed and examined during meditation and contemplation.

**Prana Vayu** operates from the heart area, and is an upward flowing energy, having to do with vitalizing life forces.

**Apana Vayu** operates from the base of the torso, in the rectum area, is a downward flowing energy, and has to do with eliminating or throwing off what is no longer needed.

**Samana Vayu** operates from the navel area, deals with digestion, and allows the mental discrimination between useful and not useful thoughts.

**Udana Vayu** operates from the throat and drives exhalation, operating in conjunction with Prana Vayu, which deals with inhalation.

**Vyana Vayu** operates throughout the whole body, having no particular center, and is a coordinating energy throughout the various systems.

**Ten Senses or Indriyas:** The human being is like a building with ten doors. Five are entrance doors, and five are exit doors. Witnessing these ten senses is an important part of meditation, contemplation, and meditation in action.

**Karmendriyas:** The five exit doors are five means of expression, which are called Karmendriyas (Karma means action; Indriyas are the means or senses).

**Jnanendriyas:** The five entrance doors are the five cognitive senses, which are called Jnanendriyas (Jnana means knowing; Indriyas are the means or senses).

**Four functions of mind:** The four functions of mind are manas, chitta, ahamkara and buddhi. To witness these four is a tremendous practice for advancing in meditation.

**Manas** = sensory, processing mind

**Chitta** = storage of impressions

**Ahamkara** = "I-maker" or Ego

**Buddhi** = knows, decides, judges, and discriminates

This is devoted to presenting the ancient Self-Realization path of the Tradition of the Himalayan masters in simple, understandable and beneficial ways, while not compromising quality or depth. The goal of our sadhana or practices is the highest Joy that comes from the Realization in direct experience of the center of consciousness, the Self, the Atman or Purusha, which is one and the same with the Absolute Reality.

This Self-Realization comes through Yoga meditation of the Yoga Sutras, the contemplative insight of Advaita Vedanta, and the intense devotion of Samaya Sri Vidya Tantra, the three of which complement one another like fingers on a hand. We employ the classical approaches of Raja, Jnana, Karma, and Bhakti Yoga, as well as Hatha, Kriya, Kundalini, Laya, Mantra, Nada, Siddha, and Tantra Yoga. Meditation, contemplation, mantra and prayer finally converge into a unified force directed towards the final stage, piercing the pearl of wisdom called bindu, leading to the Absolute.

# How can we get to the state of pure consciousness?

BY [OLGA KABEL](#) MAY 16, 2018

In 2004, one scientific study made quite a splash. In this study, the scientists monitored the brain activity of eight Tibetan monks and recorded very high-frequency *gamma waves* that became dominant in states of deep meditation. Previous studies have demonstrated that gamma waves are present during mental processes such as attention, working memory, learning, or conscious perception ([references 3-7](#)). "Gamma oscillations have been proposed to act as an integrative mechanism that may bring a widely distributed set of neurons together into a coherent ensemble that underlies a cognitive act."(1) Gamma waves show up in both waking and dreaming states but usually in those states the gamma-band activity is desynchronized. Yet, during the states of deep meditation, the brains of experienced practitioners exhibited amazing gamma synchrony. This is important because "long-distance synchrony is thought to reflect large-scale neural coordination. [...] Long-distance synchrony increases by  $\approx 30\%$  on average during meditation."(2)

What is remarkable about this is that we tend to think of meditation as a peaceful state, and would probably guess that in a state of deep meditation, the brain waves were likely to be more slow and quiet, similar to deep sleep states. It turns out that the opposite is true. The brain waves during meditation are of higher frequency than during all other conscious states, including both [waking and dreaming states](#). It is as if the brain is highly aware of the experience but is not disturbed by it. Might this be the state of "superconsciousness" or "pure consciousness" that [Mandukya Upanishad](#) talks about?

Another interesting distinction that the study made was between object-based and objectless meditation. It showed that the brain waves during deep loving-kindness meditation (objectless meditation) were different from object-based meditation (when you focus your attention on something specific, which in yoga, we call one-pointedness). "Objectless meditation does not directly attend to a specific object but rather cultivates a state of being. Objectless meditation does so in such a way that, according to reports given after meditation, the intentional or

object-oriented aspect of experience appears to dissipate in meditation. This dissipation of focus on a particular object is achieved by letting the very essence of the meditation that is practiced (on compassion in this case) become the sole content of the experience without focusing on particular objects. By using similar techniques during the practice, the practitioner lets his feelings of loving-kindness and compassion permeate his mind without directing his attention toward a particular object. These phenomenological differences suggest that these various meditative states (those that involve focusing on an object and those that are objectless) may be associated with different EEG oscillatory signatures.” (2)

This description of object-based and objectless meditation sounds remarkably similar to the three stages of meditation defined in the yoga tradition. According to yoga teachings on meditation, at the beginning of your meditation exploration, it is useful to pick an internal or external object to focus on. This object serves the important purpose of training your focus and teaching you to be able to concentrate on one thing for an extended period of time (developing a one-pointed focus). Later on, as the practitioner becomes more experienced, the object of meditation serves more as a gateway to the meditative *state of being*. Those ideas are described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali as three stages of meditation: dharana, dhyanam, and samadhi.



### **First step: Dharana**

*Dharana* (-dha- “to hold”) means being able to hold attention on an object for progressively longer periods of time without distraction. For example, you can hold your attention on the light of a candle or the rhythm of your breath for an extended period of time.



### Second step: Dhyanam

*Dhyanam* (-dhi- “to reflect”) occurs when there begins to be a relationship between the mind and the object of attention. It means that you gain some insights about yourself from concentrating on the object. For example, by meditating on an image of fire in your belly you gain insights about your ability to process your experiences.



### Third step: Samadhi

In the state of *Samadhi*, the relationship between the object and the mind becomes very close, as if they have merged. At that point the mind begins to shed its conditioning and the object shines forth as it is. It is as if you take on the qualities of an object, become it.

---

At that point, according to Patanjali, instead of being clouded by your baggage, the mind becomes like a transparent crystal, able to reflect the object perceived, the instrument of perception (the mind), and the process of perception. It sounds as if

Samadhi is a gateway to the state of [Turya \(pure consciousness\)](#) that might be manifested in high-frequency, synchronous gamma brain waves.

In our normal daily life, we continuously cycle through three stages of consciousness: waking state, dreamless sleep, and dream state. All of those three states are about “me, me, me” – assessing everything that comes into your awareness through the lens of its relevance to YOU. This is a normal brain activity that prioritizes your survival and well-being. However, according to both the Buddhist and the yoga traditions, all this concern with self is contained within a wider pool of pure awareness. “In particular, awareness does not need a self to operate. Aspects of self arise and disperse within awareness, but awareness persists as a field of consciousness independent of the vicissitudes of self.” (3)

If you are interested in experiencing this state of pure consciousness beyond the me-me-me concerns, you can get there through the stages of Dharana-Dhyana-Samadhi (object-based meditation) that, over time, leads to the state of Turya. Or you can bypass the work of object-based meditation and instead focus on cultivating the state of loving-kindness right away (which is considered to be your natural state of consciousness in Buddhist tradition). In yoga, this is called *Ishvara Pranidhana*. Yoga sutra 1.23 states that another way to experience your true nature (the state of pure consciousness) is through a special process of devotion and letting go into the creative source from which we all emerged. However, both the states of loving-kindness and *Ishvara Pranidhana* are not easy to just fall into for most of us – it usually requires extensive training. For most of us, the Dharana-Dhyana-Samadhi route is more doable.

## **The meaning of Om: Four states of human consciousness**

There are three main states of consciousness that you reliably cycle through every 24 hours: waking state, dreamless sleep, and dream state. Each of those states is characterized by [a distinctive electrical brain activity](#). But long before scientists were able to record and analyze our brain waves, yogis knew that these states

were very different from one another. They postulated that all states of consciousness are reflected in the symbol and sound of OM.

Technically, the sound that we know as OM is actually AUM\_; it consists of three letters and silence at the end. The entire *Mandukya Upanishad* is dedicated to the meaning of OM and how it represents the states of human consciousness. Here is what it says (translated and interpreted by Swami Jnaneshvara) (1).

# THE MEANING OF OM (AUM\_)

## FOUR STATES OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

### DEEP SLEEP STATE (PRAJNA) - "M" OF AUM\_

In this unconscious state, there is neither the desire for any gross or subtle object, nor any dream sequences. The deep impressions of the mind are stored here in their latent form, like seeds. When certain conditions are met, they can play out in dreams or grow into actions in the waking state.

### PURE CONSCIOUSNESS (TURIYA) - " " OF AUM\_

In this state, consciousness is neither turned outward nor inward. It permeates and observes the other three states. From the vantage point of Turiya, one sees the entire panorama of the play of the levels of consciousness.

### WAKING STATE (JAGRAT) - "A" OF AUM\_

In this state, consciousness is turned outward to the external world. It is about experiencing gross material objects through the senses. This is the conscious level of mental and emotional processing.

### DREAM STATE (SVAPNA) - "U" OF AUM\_

In this state, consciousness is turned towards the inner world. The mind can work out its unfulfilled wants, wishes, desires, attractions, and aversions that are not allowed to play out in the external world.

BASED ON MANDUKYA UPANISHAD

SequenceWiz

The descriptions of the first three states correspond very closely with how modern science describes our [brain activity during those states](#):

- Waking state – Fast frequency chaotic brain waves due to processing huge amounts of sensory information

- Dreamless sleep (NREM) – Slow-wave sleep that is synchronous and predictable and sweeps from the front to the back of the brain, encouraging collaboration between distant regions of the brain
- Dream sleep (REM) – fast and desynchronized brain waves processing the inner content of the mind – emotions, motivations, memories

Yet *Mandukya Upanishad* also talks about the fourth state of consciousness, which is different from the other three states. “The fourth aspect of Atman or Self is *Turiya*, literally the fourth. In this fourth state, consciousness is neither turned outward nor inward. Nor is it both outward and inward; it is beyond both cognition and the absence of cognition. This fourth state of *Turiya* cannot be experienced through the senses or known by comparison, deductive reasoning, or inference; it is indescribable, incomprehensible, and unthinkable with the mind. This is Pure Consciousness itself. This is the real Self. It is within the cessation of all phenomena. It is serene, tranquil, filled with bliss, and is one without second. This is the real or true Self that is to be realized.” (1)

This fourth state is usually called “pure consciousness” or “superconsciousness”. It sounds remarkably similar to the meditative states with distinctive brainwave activity that the scientists had observed in long-term meditation practitioners.

**Om**



*Om* ligature in [Devanagari script](#) *Om* (ॐ) in [Tamil script](#) with a *trishula* at [Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple, Singapore](#); *Om* appears frequently as an [icon](#) in temples (*kovils*) and spiritual retreats. A *rangoli* featuring *Om* surrounded by stylised [peacocks](#); *Om* often features prominently in the religious art and iconography of [Indian religions](#). A *rakhi* in the shape of *Om*

ਕਿ→ਕਿ

**This article contains Indic text.** Without proper [rendering support](#), you may see [question marks or boxes](#), misplaced vowels or missing conjuncts instead of Indic text.

*Om* (or *Aum*; [listen](#)<sup>ⓘ</sup>; [Sanskrit](#): ॐ, ओम्, [romanized](#): *Om*, *Aum*, [ISO 15919](#): *Ōṃ*) is a [polysemous](#) symbol representing a

sacred sound, [seed syllable](#), [mantra](#), and [invocation](#) in [Hinduism](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup> Its written form is the most important symbol in the Hindu religion.<sup>[3]</sup> It is the essence of the supreme Absolute,<sup>[2]</sup> consciousness,<sup>[4][5][6]</sup> *Ātman*, *Brahman*, or the cosmic world.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup> In [Indian religions](#), *Om* serves as a sonic representation of the divine, a standard of [Vedic](#) authority and a central aspect of [soteriological](#) doctrines and practices.<sup>[10]</sup> It is the basic tool for meditation in the yogic path to [liberation](#).<sup>[11]</sup> The syllable is often found at the beginning and the end of chapters in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and other [Hindu texts](#).<sup>[9]</sup> It is described as the goal of all the Vedas.<sup>[12]</sup>

*Om* emerged in the [Vedic corpus](#) and is said to be an encapsulated form of *Samavedic* chants or songs.<sup>[1][10]</sup> It is a sacred spiritual incantation made before and during the recitation of spiritual texts, during *puja* and private prayers, in ceremonies of rites of passage (*samskara*) such as weddings, and during meditative and spiritual activities such as *Pranava yoga*.<sup>[13][14]</sup> It is part of the iconography found in ancient and medieval era manuscripts, temples, monasteries, and spiritual retreats in [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#), [Jainism](#), and [Sikhism](#).<sup>[15][16]</sup> As a syllable, it is often chanted either independently or before a spiritual recitation and during [meditation](#) in [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#), and [Jainism](#).<sup>[17][18]</sup>

The syllable *Om* is also referred to as **Onkara (Om-kara)** and **Pranava** among [many other names](#).<sup>[19][20]</sup>

## Common names and synonyms

The syllable *Om* is referred to by many names, including:

- *Pranava* (प्रणव); literally, "fore-sound", referring to *Om* as the primeval sound.<sup>[21][22]</sup>
- *Onkāra* (ओङ्कार) or *omkāra* (ओंकार); literally, "*Om*-maker", denoting the first source of the sound *Om* and connoting the [act of creation](#).<sup>[23][24][25][26]</sup>
  - *Ik Onkār* (ੴ or ਇੱਕ ਓਅੰਕਾਰ); literally, "one *Om*-maker", and an [epithet of God](#) in [Sikhism](#). (see [below](#)).

- *Udgītha* (उद्गीथ); meaning "song, chant", a word found in *Samaveda* and *bhasya* (commentaries) based on it. It is also used as a name of the syllable Om in Chandogya Upanishad.<sup>[27]</sup>
- *Akṣara* (अक्षर); literally, "imperishable, immutable", and also "letter of the alphabet" or "syllable".
  - *Ekākṣara*; literally, "one letter of the alphabet", referring to its representation as a single *ligature*. (see *below*)

## Origin and spiritual significance

The etymological origins of *ōm* (*aum*) have long been discussed and disputed, with even the *Upanishads* having proposed multiple *Sanskrit* etymologies for *aum*, including: from "*ām*" (आम्; "yes"), from "*āvam*" (आवम्; "that, thus, yes"), and from the Sanskrit roots "*āv-*" (अव्; "to urge") or "*āp-*" (आप्; "to attain").<sup>[28][A]</sup> In 1889, *Maurice Bloomfield* proposed an origin from a *Proto-Indo-European* introductory *particle* "*\*au*" with a function similar to the Sanskrit particle "atha" (अथ).<sup>[28]</sup> However, contemporary *Indologist* *Asko Parpola* proposes a borrowing from *Dravidian* "*\*ām*" meaning "'it is so', 'let it be so', 'yes'", a contraction of "*\*ākum*", cognate with modern *Tamil* "*ām*" (ஆம்) meaning "yes".<sup>[28][29]</sup> In the *Jaffna Tamil dialect* spoken in Sri Lanka, *aum* is the word for yes.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Regardless of its original meaning, the syllable *Om* evolves to mean many abstract ideas even in the earliest *Upanishads*. *Max Müller* and other scholars state that these philosophical texts recommend *Om* as a basic tool for meditation<sup>[11]</sup> and explain the various meanings that the syllable may hold in the mind of one meditating, ranging from "artificial and senseless" to the "highest concepts such as the cause of the Universe, essence of life, *Brahman*, *Atman*, and Self-knowledge".<sup>[30][31]</sup>

The syllable *Om* is first mentioned in the *Upanishads*. It has been associated with various concepts, such as "cosmic sound", "mystical syllable", "affirmation to something divine", or as symbolism for abstract spiritual concepts in the *Upanishads*.<sup>[9]</sup> In the *Aranyaka* and the *Brahmana* layers of Vedic texts, the syllable is so widespread and linked to knowledge, that it stands for the "whole of Veda".<sup>[9]</sup> The symbolic foundations of *Om* are repeatedly discussed in the oldest layers of the early *Upanishads*.<sup>[32][33]</sup> The *Aitareya Brahmana* of Rig Veda, in section 5.32, suggests that the three phonetic components of *Om* (*a + u + m*) correspond to the three stages of cosmic creation, and when it is read or said, it celebrates the creative powers of the universe.<sup>[9][34]</sup> However, in the eight anuvaka of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, which consensus research indicates was formulated around the same time or preceding *Aitareya Brahmana*, the sound *Aum* is attributed to reflecting the inner part of the word *Brahman*. Put another way, it is the *Brahman*, in the form of a word.<sup>[35]</sup> The *Brahmana* layer of Vedic texts equates *Om* with *bhur-bhuvah-svah*, which symbolizes "the whole Veda". They offer various shades of meaning to *Om*, such as it being "the universe beyond the sun", or that which is "mysterious and inexhaustible", or "the infinite language, the infinite knowledge", or "essence of breath, life, everything that exists", or that "with which one is liberated".<sup>[9]</sup> The *Samaveda*, the poetical Veda, orthographically maps *Om* to the audible, the musical truths in its numerous variations (*Oum*, *Aum*, *Ovā Ovā Ovā Um*, etc.) and then attempts to extract *musical meters* from it.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Pronunciation

When occurring within spoken [Classical Sanskrit](#), the syllable is subject to the normal rules of [sandhi](#) in [Sanskrit grammar](#), with the additional peculiarity that the initial *o* of "*Om*" is the [guṇa vowel grade](#) of *u*, not the [vr̥ddhi](#) grade, and is therefore pronounced as a [monophthong](#) with a [long vowel](#) ([oː]), i.e. *ōm* not *aum*.<sup>[B][36]</sup> Furthermore, the final *m* is often [assimilated](#) into the preceding vowel as [nasalisation](#) (*raṅga*). As a result, *Om* is regularly pronounced [õː] in the context of Sanskrit.

However, this *o* reflects the older [Vedic Sanskrit diphthong](#) *au*, which at that stage in the language's history had not yet [monophthongised](#) to *o*. This being so, the syllable *Om* is often [archaically](#) considered as consisting of three [phonemes](#): "a-u-m".<sup>[37][38][39][40]</sup> Accordingly, some denominations maintain the archaic diphthong *au* viewing it to be more authentic and closer to the language of the [Vedas](#).

In the context of the [Vedas](#), particularly the Vedic [Brahmanas](#), the vowel is often [pluta](#) ("three times as long"), [indicating a length](#) of three [morae](#) (*trimātra*), that is, the time it takes to say three [light syllables](#). Additionally, a diphthong becomes *pluta* with the prolongation of its first vowel.<sup>[36]</sup> When *e* and *o* undergo *pluti* they typically revert to the original diphthongs with the initial *a* prolonged,<sup>[41]</sup> realised as an [overlong open back unrounded vowel](#) (*āum* or *a3um* [ɑːum]). This extended duration is emphasised by denominations who regard it as more authentically Vedic, such as [Arya Samaj](#).

However, *Om* is also attested in the [Upanishads](#) without [pluta](#),<sup>[C]</sup> and many languages related to or influenced by Classical Sanskrit, such as [Hindustani](#), share its pronunciation of *Om* ([õː] or [oːm]).

## Written representations

### South Asia



Statue depicting [Shiva](#) as the [Nataraja](#) dancing in a posture resembling the Devanagari ligature for *Om*; [Joseph Campbell](#) argued that the [Nataraja](#) statue represents *Om* as a symbol of the entirety of "consciousness, universe" and "the message that God is within a person and without"<sup>[42]</sup>

[Nagari](#) or [Devanagari](#) representations are found [epigraphically](#) on sculpture dating from [Medieval India](#) and on ancient coins in regional scripts throughout South Asia. *Om* is represented in [Devanagari](#) as ओम्, composed of four elements: the [vowel letter](#) अ (*a*), the [vowel diacritic](#) ो (*o*), the [consonant letter](#) म (*m*), and the [virama](#) stroke ् which indicates the absence of an implied final vowel. Historically, the combination औ represented a diphthong, often transcribed as *au*, but it now represents a long vowel, *ō*. (See [above](#).) The syllable is sometimes written ओ३म्, where ३ (i.e., the digit "3") explicitly indicates [pluta](#) ('three times as long') which is otherwise only implied. For this same reason *Om* may also be written ओऽम् in languages such as [Hindi](#), with the [avagraha](#) (ऽ) being used to indicate prolonging the vowel sound. (However, this differs from the usage of the [avagraha](#) in [Sanskrit](#), where it would instead indicate the [prodelision](#) of the initial vowel.) *Om* may also be written औ, with an [anusvāra](#) reflecting the pronunciation of [õ:] in languages such as [Hindi](#). In languages such as [Urdu](#) and [Sindhi](#) *Om* may be written اوم in [Arabic script](#), although speakers of these languages may also use Devanagari representations.

The commonly seen representation of the syllable *Om*, ॐ, is a [cursive ligature](#) in [Devanagari](#), combining अ (*a*) with उ (*u*) and the [chandrabindu](#) (ँ, *m*). In [Unicode](#), the symbol is encoded at U+0950 ॐ DEVANAGARI OM and at U+1F549 ॐ OM SYMBOL as a "generic symbol independent of Devanagari font".<sup>[43]</sup>

In some South Asian [writing systems](#), the *Om* symbol has been simplified further. In [Bengali](#) and [Assamese](#) *Om* is written simply as ॐ without an additional curl. In languages such as [Bengali](#) differences in pronunciation compared to [Sanskrit](#) have made the addition of a curl

for *u* redundant. Although the spelling is simpler, the pronunciation remains [ō:]. Similarly, in **Odia** *Om* is written as ଓଁ without an additional diacritic.

In **Tamil**, *Om* is written as ஓம், a ligature of ஓ (*ō*) and ம் (*m*), while in **Kannada**, **Telugu**, and **Malayalam**, *Om* is written simply as the letter for *ō* followed by *anusvāra* (ಓಂ, ఓం, and ഓം, respectively).

There have been proposals that the *Om* syllable may already have had written representations in **Brahmi script**, dating to before the **Common Era**. A proposal by Deb (1921) held that the *swastika* is a **monogrammatic** representation of the syllable *Om*, wherein two Brahmi /o/ characters (U+11011 𑀓 BRAHMI LETTER O) were superposed crosswise and the 'm' was represented by dot.<sup>[44]</sup> A commentary in *Nature* (1922) considers this theory questionable and unproven.<sup>[45]</sup> **A. B. Walawalkar** (1951) proposed that *Om* was represented using the Brahmi symbols for "A", "U", and "M" (𑀅𑀓𑀭), and that this may have influenced the unusual **epigraphical** features of the symbol ॐ for *Om*.<sup>[46][47]</sup> **Parker** (1909) wrote that an "Aum monogram", distinct from the swastika, is found among **Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions in Sri Lanka**,<sup>[48]</sup> including **Anuradhapura era** coins, dated from the 1st to 4th centuries CE, which are embossed with *Om* along with other symbols.<sup>[49]</sup>

## East and Southeast Asia

The *Om* symbol, with **epigraphical** variations, is also found in many **Southeast Asian** countries.

In **Southeast Asia**, the *Om* symbol is widely conflated with that of the **unalome**; originally a representation of the Buddha's **urna** curl and later a symbol of the path to **nirvana**, it is a popular **yantra** in Southeast Asia, particularly in **Cambodia** and **Thailand**. It frequently appears in *sak yant* religious tattoos, and has been a part of various flags and official emblems such as in the **Thong Chom Klao** of **King Rama IV** (r. 1851–1868)<sup>[50]</sup> and the present-day **royal arms of Cambodia**.<sup>[51]</sup>

The **Khmer** adopted the symbol since the 1st century during the **Kingdom of Funan**, where it is also seen on artefacts from **Angkor Borei**, once the capital of Funan. The symbol is seen on numerous Khmer statues from **Chenla** to **Khmer Empire** periods and still in used until the present day.<sup>[52][53][*better source needed*]</sup>

In **Chinese characters**, *Om* is typically **transliterated** as either 唵 (**pinyin**: *ǎn*) or 唵 (**pinyin**: *wēng*).

## Representation in various scripts

### Northern Brahmic


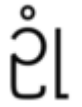
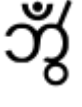




Script	Unicode	Image

Bengali-Assamese	ওঁ	ঐ
Devanagari	ॐ	ॐ
Devanagari	ओम्	ओम्
Devanagari (Jain symbol)	ॐ	ॐ
Gurmukhi (Ik Onkar)	ੴ	ੴ
Gurmukhi (Ik Onkar)	ੴ	ੴ
Lepcha	ཨ	ཨ
Limbu	ᱠᱟ	ᱠᱟ
Meitei Mayek (Anji)	ᱠᱟ	ᱠᱟ
Modi	𑂔	𑂔
Odia	ଐ	ଐ

Odia	ଓଁ	ଓଁ
'Phags-pa	ཨྵཌྵ	
Pracalit	ॐ	ॐ
Ranjana		ॐ
Sharada	ॐ	ॐ
Siddham	ॐ	ॐ
Soyombo	ཨྵཌྵ	ཨྵཌྵ
Takri	ॐ	ॐ
Tibetan (Uchen)	ཨྵཌྵ	ཨྵཌྵ
Tirhuta, Mithilakshar	ॐ	ॐ

Zanabazar	ᠮᠤ	
-----------	----	--

### Southern Brahmic

Script	Unicode	Image
Balinese	ᬮᬶ	
Burmese	ဣ	
Chakma	ᱠᱟ	
Cham	ᨆ	
Cham (Homkar)	ᨆᩣ᩠ᨄ	
Grantha	ᱚ	
Javanese	ᬮᬶ	

Kannada	ಓಂ	ಓಂ
Kawi	ꦲꦺ	ꦲꦺ
Khmer	ឃ	ឃ
Khmer (Unalome)	ॐ	ॐ
Lao	ໄອ	ໄອ
Malayalam	ഓം	ഓം
Sinhala	ඔඹ	ඔඹ
Sundanese	ꦲꦺ	ꦲꦺ
Tai Lanna	ໄອ	
Tamil	ஐ	ஐ
Telugu	[d]	ఓం

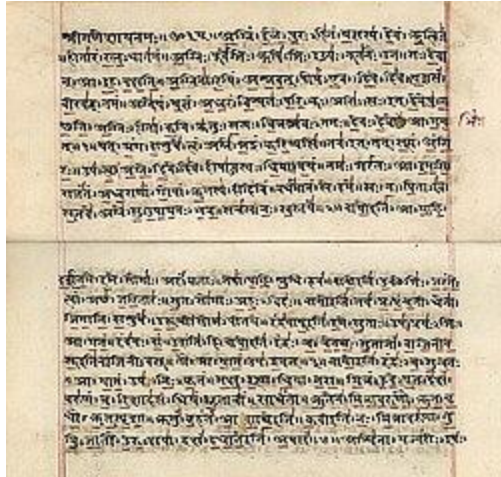
Thai	โธ	
Thai (Khomut)	໑	

### Non-Brahmic

Script	Unicode	Image
Latin	Ō̈́	
Arabic	اوم <sup>[a]</sup>	
Chinese	唵	
Hangul	옴	
Kanji	阿吽	
Katakana	オーム	
Manchu	ᡠᡳᡵᡠ	
Mongolian (Ali Gali)	ᡠᡳᡵᡠ	
Tangut	𑖇 <sup>[a]</sup>	

Thaana	𑀘𑀓	𑀘𑀓
Warang Citi	𑀓𑀘	𑀓𑀘


# Hinduism



Om appears frequently in Hindu texts and scriptures, notably appearing in the first verse of the [Rigveda](#)<sup>[9]</sup>

Part of a series on

**Hinduism**



In [Hinduism](#), *Om* is one of the most important spiritual sounds.<sup>[3]</sup> The syllable is often found at the beginning and the end of chapters in the [Vedas](#), the [Upanishads](#), and other [Hindu texts](#),<sup>[9]</sup> and is often chanted either independently or before a mantra, as a sacred spiritual incantation made before and during the recitation of spiritual texts, during [puja](#) and private prayers, in ceremonies of rites of passages ([sanskara](#)) such as weddings, and during meditative and spiritual activities such as [yoga](#).<sup>[13][14]</sup>

It is the most sacred syllable symbol and [mantra](#) of [Brahman](#),<sup>[54]</sup> which is the ultimate reality, consciousness or [Atman](#) (Self within).<sup>[7][8][4][5][55]</sup>

It is called the *Shabda Brahman* (Brahman as sound) and believed to be the primordial sound (*pranava*) of the universe.<sup>[56]</sup>

## Vedas

*Om* came to be used as a standard utterance at the beginning of mantras, chants or citations taken from the *Vedas*. For example, the *Gayatri mantra*, which consists of a verse from the *Rigveda* Samhita (RV 3.62.10), is prefixed not just by *Om* but by *Om* followed by the formula *bhūr bhuvah svah*.<sup>[57]</sup> Such recitations continue to be in use in Hinduism, with many major incantations and ceremonial functions beginning and ending with *Om*.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Brahmanas

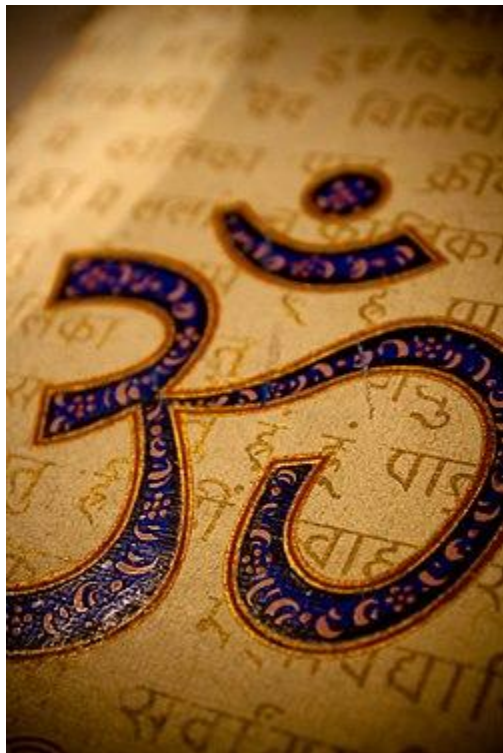
### Aitareya Brahmana

The *Aitareya Brahmana* (7.18.13) explains *Om* as "an acknowledgment, melodic confirmation, something that gives momentum and energy to a hymn".<sup>[3]</sup>

*Om* is the agreement (*pratigara*) with a hymn. Likewise is *tathā* = 'so be it' [the agreement] with a [worldly] song (*gāthā*) [= the applause]. But *Om* is something divine, and *tathā* is something human.

—Aitareya Brahmana, 7.18.13<sup>[3]</sup>

## Upanishads



*Om* is given many meanings and layers of symbolism in the *Upanishads*, including "the sacred sound, the *Yes!*, the *Vedas*, the *udgitha* (song of the universe), the infinite, the all encompassing, the whole world, the truth, the *Ultimate Reality*, the

finest essence, [the cause of the universe](#), the essence of life, the [Brahman](#), the [ātman](#), the vehicle of deepest knowledge, and [self-knowledge](#) (*ātma jñāna*)".<sup>[31]</sup>  
**Chandogya Upanishad**

The [Chandogya Upanishad](#) is one of the oldest Upanishads of Hinduism. It opens with the recommendation that "let a man meditate on Om".<sup>[58]</sup> It calls the syllable *Om* as *udgitha* (उद्गीथ; song, chant), and asserts that the significance of the syllable is thus: the essence of all beings is earth, the essence of earth is water, the essence of water are the plants, the essence of plants is man, the essence of man is speech, the essence of speech is the [Rigveda](#), the essence of the Rigveda is the Samaveda, and the essence of Samaveda is the *udgitha* (song, *Om*).<sup>[59]</sup>

*Ṛc* (ऋच्) is speech, states the text, and *sāman* (सामन्) is breath; they are pairs, and because they have love for each other, speech and breath find themselves together and mate to produce a song.<sup>[58][59]</sup> The highest song is *Om*, asserts section 1.1 of Chandogya Upanishad. It is the symbol of awe, of reverence, of threefold knowledge because *Adhvaryu* invokes it, the *Hotr* recites it, and *Udgatr* sings it.<sup>[59][60]</sup>

The second volume of the first chapter continues its discussion of syllable *Om*, explaining its use as a struggle between [Devas](#) (gods) and [Asuras](#) (demons).<sup>[61]</sup> Max Muller states that this struggle between gods and demons is considered allegorical by ancient [Indian](#) scholars, as good and evil inclinations within man, respectively.<sup>[62]</sup> The legend in section 1.2 of Chandogya Upanishad states that gods took the *Udgitha* (song of *Om*) unto themselves, thinking, "with this *song* we shall overcome the demons".<sup>[63]</sup> The syllable *Om* is thus implied as that which inspires the good inclinations within each person.<sup>[62][63]</sup>

Chandogya Upanishad's exposition of syllable *Om* in its opening chapter combines etymological speculations, symbolism, metric structure and philosophical themes.<sup>[60][64]</sup> In the second chapter of the Chandogya Upanishad, the meaning and significance of *Om* evolves into a philosophical discourse, such as in section 2.10 where *Om* is linked to the Highest Self,<sup>[65]</sup> and section 2.23 where the text asserts *Om* is the essence of three forms of knowledge, *Om* is [Brahman](#) and "Om is all this [observed world]".<sup>[66]</sup>

### **Katha Upanishad**

The [Katha Upanishad](#) is the legendary story of a little boy, [Nachiketa](#), the son of sage Vājaśravasa, who meets [Yama](#), the Vedic deity of death. Their conversation evolves to a discussion of the nature of man, knowledge, [Atman](#) (Self) and [moksha](#) (liberation).<sup>[67]</sup> In section 1.2, Katha Upanishad characterises knowledge (*vidyā*) as the pursuit of the good, and ignorance (*avidyā*) as the pursuit of the pleasant.<sup>[68]</sup> It teaches that the essence of the Veda is to make man liberated and free, look past what has happened and what has not happened, free from the past and the future, beyond good and evil, and one word for this essence is the word *Om*.<sup>[69]</sup>

The word which all the Vedas proclaim,  
That which is expressed in every [Tapas](#) (penance, austerity, meditation),  
That for which they live the life of a [Brahmacharin](#),  
Understand that word in its essence: **Om! that is the word.**  
Yes, this syllable is [Brahman](#),  
This syllable is the highest.

He who knows that syllable,  
Whatever he desires, is his.

—Katha Upanishad 1.2.15-1.2.16<sup>[69]</sup>

### Maitri Upanishad



A [Pahari painting](#) of *Om* (ॐ), c. 1780-1800, decorated with deities: [Shiva](#) and [Shakti](#) (could be [Vaishnavi](#) or [Siddhidatri](#)); [Vishnu](#) and [Lakshmi](#) seated upon [Shesha](#); [Harihara](#) (Vishnu-Shiva fusion deity); [Brahma](#); and [Dattatreya](#) as a representation of the [Trimurti](#) (top-to-bottom, left-to-right)

The [Maitrayaniya Upanishad](#) in sixth *Prapathakas* (lesson) discusses the meaning and significance of *Om*. The text asserts that *Om* represents Brahman-Atman. The three roots of the syllable, states the Maitri Upanishad, are *A + U + M*.<sup>[70]</sup>

The sound is the body of Self, and it repeatedly manifests in three:

- as gender-endowed body – feminine, masculine, neuter;
- as light-endowed body – [Agni](#), [Vayu](#), and [Aditya](#);
- as deity-endowed body – Brahma, Rudra,<sup>[E]</sup> and Vishnu;
- as mouth-endowed body – *garhapatya*, *dakshinagni*, and *ahavaniya*;<sup>[F]</sup>
- as knowledge-endowed body – [Rig](#), [Saman](#), and [Yajur](#);<sup>[G]</sup>
- as world-endowed body – *bhūr*, *bhuvah*, and *svah*;<sup>[H]</sup>
- as time-endowed body – past, present, and future;
- as heat-endowed body – [breath](#), [fire](#), and [Sun](#);
- as growth-endowed body – food, water, and [Moon](#);
- as thought-endowed body – [intellect](#), [mind](#), and [psyche](#).<sup>[70][71]</sup>

Brahman exists in two forms – the material form, and the immaterial formless.<sup>[72]</sup> The material form is changing, unreal. The immaterial formless is not changing, real. The immortal formless is truth,

the truth is the Brahman, the Brahman is the light, the light is the Sun which is the syllable *Om* as the Self.<sup>[73][74][1]</sup>

The world is *Om*, its light is Sun, and the Sun is also the light of the syllable *Om*, asserts the Upanishad. Meditating on *Om*, is acknowledging and meditating on the Brahman-Atman (Self).<sup>[70]</sup>

### Mundaka Upanishad



[Sri Yantra](#) with *Om* (ॐ) at its center, [Sri Mariamman Temple, Singapore](#); [yantras](#) are frequently used as aids in [Hindu meditation](#)

The [Mundaka Upanishad](#) in the second *Mundakam* (part), suggests the means to knowing the Atman and the Brahman are meditation, self-reflection, and introspection and that they can be aided by the symbol *Om*. It uses a bow and arrow analogy, where the bow symbolizes the focused mind, the arrow symbolizes the self (Atman), and the target represents the ultimate reality (Brahman).<sup>[76][77]</sup>

That which is flaming, which is subtler than the subtle,  
on which the worlds are set, and their inhabitants –  
That is the indestructible Brahman.<sup>[J]</sup>  
It is life, it is speech, it is mind. That is the real. It is immortal.  
It is a mark to be penetrated. Penetrate It, my friend.

Taking as a bow the great weapon of the Upanishad,  
one should put upon it an arrow sharpened by meditation,  
Stretching it with a thought directed to the essence of That,  
Penetrate<sup>[K]</sup> that Imperishable as the mark, my friend.

**Om** is the bow, the arrow is the Self, Brahman the mark,  
By the undistracted man is It to be penetrated,  
One should come to be in It,  
as the arrow becomes one with the mark.

—Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.2 – 2.2.4<sup>[78][79]</sup>

[Adi Shankara](#), in his review of the Mundaka Upanishad, states *Om* as a symbolism for [Atman](#) (Self).<sup>[80]</sup>

## Mandukya Upanishad

The [Mandukya Upanishad](#) opens by declaring, "Om!, this syllable is this whole world".<sup>[81]</sup> Thereafter, it presents various explanations and theories on what it means and signifies.<sup>[82]</sup> This discussion is built on a structure of "four fourths" or "fourfold", derived from *A + U + M + "silence"* (or without an element).<sup>[81][82]</sup>

- *Om* as all states of [Time](#).

In verse 1, the Upanishad states that time is threefold: the past, the present and the future, that these three are *Om*. The fourth fourth of time is that which transcends time, that too is *Om* expressed.<sup>[82]</sup>

- *Om* as all states of [Ātman](#) .

In verse 2, states the Upanishad, everything is Brahman, but Brahman is Atman (the Self), and that the Atman is fourfold.<sup>[81]</sup> Johnston summarizes these four states of Self, respectively, as seeking the physical, seeking inner thought, seeking the causes and spiritual consciousness, and the fourth state is realizing oneness with the Self, the Eternal.<sup>[83]</sup>

- *Om* as all states of [Consciousness](#).

In verses 3 to 6, the Mandukya Upanishad enumerates four states of consciousness: wakeful, dream, deep sleep, and the state of *ekatma* (being one with Self, the oneness of Self).<sup>[82]</sup> These four are *A + U + M + "without an element"* respectively.<sup>[82]</sup>

- *Om* as all of [Knowledge](#).

In verses 9 to 12, the Mandukya Upanishad enumerates fourfold etymological roots of the syllable *Om*. It states that the first element of *Om* is *A*, which is from *Apti* (obtaining, reaching) or from *Adimatva* (being first).<sup>[81]</sup> The second element is *U*, which is from *Utkarsa* (exaltation) or from *Ubhayatva* (intermediateness).<sup>[82]</sup> The third element is *M*, from *Miti* (erecting, constructing) or from *Mi Minati, or apīti* (annihilation).<sup>[81]</sup> The fourth is without an element, without development, beyond the expanse of universe. In this way, states the Upanishad, the syllable *Om* is indeed the Atman (the self).<sup>[81][82]</sup>

## Shvetashvatara Upanishad

The [Shvetashvatara Upanishad](#), in verses 1.14 to 1.16, suggests meditating with the help of syllable *Om*, where one's perishable body is like one fuel-stick and the syllable *Om* is the second fuel-stick, which with discipline and diligent rubbing of the sticks unleashes the concealed fire of thought and awareness within. Such knowledge, asserts the Upanishad, is the goal of Upanishads.<sup>[84][85]</sup> The text asserts that *Om* is a tool of meditation empowering one to know the God within oneself, to realize one's Atman (Self).<sup>[86]</sup>



The Hindu deity [Ganesha](#) is sometimes referred to as "*oṃkārasvarūpa*" (*Om* is his form) and used as the symbol for [Upanishadic](#) concept of Brahman.<sup>[87][88]</sup>

**Ganapati Upanishad**

See also: [Ganesha § Om](#), and [Ganapatya](#)

The [Ganapati Upanishad](#) asserts that Ganesha is same as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, all deities, the universe, and *Om*.<sup>[89]</sup>

(O Lord Ganapati!) You are (the Trimurti) [Brahma](#), [Vishnu](#), and [Mahesa](#). You are [Indra](#). You are fire [[Agni](#)] and air [[Vāyu](#)]. You are the sun [[Sūrya](#)] and the moon [[Chandrama](#)]. You are [Brahman](#). You are (the three worlds) Bhuloka [earth], Antariksha-loka [space], and [Swargaloka](#) [heaven]. You are *Om*. (That is to say, You are all this).

—Gaṇapatya Atharvaśīrṣa 6<sup>[90]</sup>

### **Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana**

The [Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana](#), a Samavedic text, outlines a story where those who chant *Om* can achieve the same rewards as deities. However, the gods are concerned about humans ascending to their realm. To address this concern, a compromise is reached between the gods and Death. Humans can attain immortality, but it involves relinquishing their physical bodies to Death. This immortality entails an extended celestial existence after a long earthly life, where the practitioner aspires to acquire a divine self (atman) in a non-physical form, allowing them to reside eternally in the heavenly realm.<sup>[91]</sup>

### **Ramayana**

In [Valmiki's Ramayana](#), [Rama](#) is identified with *Om*, with [Brahma](#) saying to Rama:

"You are the sacrificial performance. You are the sacred syllable *Vashat* (on hearing which the *Adhvaryu* priest casts the oblation to a deity into the sacrificial fire). You are the mystic syllable *OM*. You are higher than the highest. People neither know your end nor your origin nor who you are in reality. You appear in all created beings in the cattle and in *brahmanas*. You exist in all quarters, in the sky, in mountains and in rivers."

—[Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda](#), Sarga 117<sup>[92]</sup>

## ***Bhagavad Gita***



An illustration of *Om* from a [Mahabharata](#) manuscript, 1795, decorated with [murtis](#) of [Surya](#), [Brahma](#), and [Vishnu](#) to the left, [Shakti](#) (could be [Maheshwari](#)) on the [chandrabindu](#) point, and [Shiva](#) (holding a [trishula](#)) to the right

The [Bhagavad Gita](#), in the [Mahabharata](#), mentions the meaning and significance of *Om* in several verses. According to Jeaneane Fowler, verse 9.17 of the [Bhagavad Gita](#) synthesizes the competing dualistic and monist streams of thought in Hinduism, by using "*Om* which is the symbol for the indescribable, impersonal [Brahman](#)".<sup>[93]</sup>

"Of this universe, I am the Father; I am also the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire. I am the purifier, the goal of knowledge, the **sacred syllable Om**. I am the [Rig Veda](#), [Sāma Veda](#), and the [Yajur Veda](#)."

—[Krishna to Arjuna](#), [Bhagavad Gita](#) 9.17<sup>[94][93]</sup>

The significance of the sacred syllable in the Hindu traditions, is similarly highlighted in other verses of the *Gita*, such as verse 17.24 where the importance of *Om* during prayers, charity and meditative practices is explained as follows:<sup>[95]</sup>

"Therefore, uttering **Om**, the acts of [yagna](#) (fire ritual), [dāna](#) (charity) and [tapas](#) (austerity) as enjoined in the scriptures, are always begun by those who study the [Brahman](#)."

—[Bhagavad Gita](#) 17.24<sup>[95][96]</sup>

## **Puranas**

The medieval era texts of Hinduism, such as the [Puranas](#) adopt and expand the concept of *Om* in their own ways, and to their own theistic sects.

### **Vaishnava traditions**

The [Vaishnava Garuda Purana](#) equates the recitation of *Om* with obeisance to Vishnu.<sup>[97]</sup> According to the [Vayu Purana](#),<sup>[citation needed]</sup> *Om* is the representation of the Hindu [Trimurti](#), and represents the union of the three gods, viz. A for [Brahma](#), U for [Vishnu](#) and M for [Shiva](#).<sup>[98]</sup> The [Bhagavata Purana](#) (9.14.46-48) identifies

the *Pranava* as the root of all Vedic mantras, and describes the combined letters of *a-u-m* as an invocation of seminal birth, [initiation](#), and the performance of sacrifice ([yajña](#)).<sup>[99]</sup>

In [Śrī Vaiṣṇava](#) tradition, sub-traditions differ on who has eligibility to say *Om*, but it is generally a "nonissue" as it is not necessary for salvation. The Teṅkalai division, represented by [Piḷḷailokācārya](#) in his *Parantapaṭi*, allow everyone to recite the *praṇava*, arguing the syllable arises spontaneously from all. The Vaṭakalai division, represented by [Vedāntadeśika](#) in his *Rahasyatrayasāra*, disallows women and *sūdras* from reciting the *praṇava*, citing older scriptural injunctions to support the stance.<sup>[100]</sup>

### Shaiva traditions



Om symbol with a [trishula](#) at [Kanaka Durga](#)

[Temple, Vijayawada](#)

In [Shaiva](#) traditions, the *Shiva Purana* highlights the relation between deity [Shiva](#) and the *Pranava* or *Om*. Shiva is declared to be *Om*, and that *Om* is Shiva.<sup>[101]</sup> After this, an epithet of [Shiva](#) is [Omkareshwar](#), the Lord, [Ishvara](#), of omkāra.

### Shakta traditions

In the [theology](#) of [Shakta](#) traditions, *Om* connotes the female divine energy, [Adi Parashakti](#), represented in the [Tridevi](#): *A* for the creative energy (the [Shakti](#) of [Brahma](#)), [Mahasaraswati](#), *U* for the preservative energy (the [Shakti](#) of [Vishnu](#)), [Mahalakshmi](#), and *M* for the destructive energy (the [Shakti](#) of [Shiva](#)), [Mahakali](#). The 12th book of the *Devi-Bhagavata Purana* describes the [Goddess](#) as the mother of the Vedas, the *Adya Shakti* (primal energy, primordial power), and the essence of the [Gayatri mantra](#).<sup>[102][103][104]</sup>

### Other texts



Radha and Krishna intertwined with an Om (ॐ) and

surrounded by scenes from their life  
**Yoga Sutra**

The aphoristic verse 1.27 of Pantanjali's *Yogasutra* links *Om* to *Yoga* practice, as follows:

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः ॥२७॥

His word is **Om**.

—Yogasutra 1.27<sup>[105]</sup>

[Johnston](#) states this verse highlights the importance of *Om* in the meditative practice of yoga, where it symbolises the three worlds in the Self; the three times – past, present, and future eternity; the three divine powers – creation, preservation, and transformation in one Being; and three essences in one Spirit – immortality, omniscience, and joy. It is, asserts Johnston, a symbol for the perfected Spiritual Man.<sup>[105]</sup>

### Chaitanya Charitamrita

In *Krishnava* traditions, *Krishna* is revered as *Svayam Bhagavan*, the Supreme Lord himself, and *Om* is interpreted in light of this. According to the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Om* is the sound representation of the Supreme Lord. *A* is said to represent *Bhagavan Krishna* (Vishnu), *U* represents *Srimati Radharani* (*Mahalakshmi*), and *M* represents *jiva*, the Self of the devotee.<sup>[106][107]</sup>

### Tantrasāra

According to the *Tantrasāra* of *Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa*, a *sūdra* may not be initiated with a mantra beginning with *Om̐* aka *praṇava*.<sup>[108]</sup>

## Jainism



Painting illustrating the Jain Om symbol, from Jaipur, c. 1840

See also: [Jainism and non-creationism](#) and [Jain symbols § Om](#)

In [Jainism](#), *Om* is considered a condensed form of reference to the [Pañca-Parameṣṭhi](#) by their initials A+A+A+U+M (o3m).

The [Dravyasamgraha](#) quotes a [Prakrit](#) line:<sup>[109]</sup>

ओम एकाक्षर पञ्चपरमेष्ठिनामादिपम् तत्कथमिति चेत अरिहंता असरीरा आयरिया तह उवज्झाया मुणियां  
*Oma ekākṣara pañca-parameṣṭhi-nāmā-dipam tat-kathamiti cheta "arihatā asarīrā āyariyā taha uvajjhāyā muṇiyā"*.

AAAUM [or just "Om"] is the one syllable short form of the initials of the five supreme beings [[pañca-parameṣṭhi](#)]: "[Arihant](#), [Ashariri](#), [Acharya](#), [Upajjhaya](#), [Muni](#)".<sup>[110]</sup>

By extension, the Om symbol is also used in Jainism to represent the first five lines of the [Namokar mantra](#),<sup>[111]</sup> the most important part of the daily prayer in the Jain religion, which honours the [Pañca-Parameṣṭhi](#). These five lines are (in English): "(1.) veneration to the Arihants, (2.) veneration to the perfect ones, (3.) veneration to the masters, (4.) veneration to the teachers, (5.) veneration to all the monks in the world".<sup>[109]</sup>

## Buddhism

*Om* is often used in some later schools of Buddhism, for example Tibetan Buddhism, which was influenced by Hinduism and Tantra.<sup>[112][113]</sup>

In [East Asian Buddhism](#), *Om* is often [transliterated](#) as the [Chinese character](#) 唵 (pinyin *ǎn*) or 唵 (pinyin *wēng*).

## Tibetan Buddhism and Vajrayana



The mantra *Om mani padme hum* written in Tibetan script on the petals of a sacred lotus around the syllable *hrih* at the center; *Om* is written on the top petal in white

In Tibetan Buddhism, *Om* is often placed at the beginning of mantras and *dharanis*. Probably the most well known mantra is "*Om mani padme hum*", the six syllable mantra of the Bodhisattva of compassion, *Avalokiteśvara*. This mantra is particularly associated with the four-armed *Ṣaḍākṣarī* form of *Avalokiteśvara*. Moreover, as a seed syllable (*Biḥa mantra*), *Om* is considered sacred and holy in Esoteric Buddhism.<sup>[114]</sup>

Some scholars interpret the first word of the mantra *Om maṇi padme hūṃ* to be *auṃ*, with a meaning similar to Hinduism – the totality of sound, existence, and consciousness.<sup>[115][116]</sup>

*Om* has been described by the 14th Dalai Lama as "composed of three pure letters, A, U, and M. These symbolize the impure body, speech, and mind of everyday unenlightened life of a practitioner; they also symbolize the pure exalted body, speech and mind of an enlightened Buddha".<sup>[117][118]</sup> According to Simpkins, *Om* is a part of many mantras in Tibetan Buddhism and is a symbolism for wholeness, perfection, and the infinite.<sup>[119]</sup>

## Japanese Buddhism



Nio statues in Kyoto prefecture of Japan, are interpreted as saying the start (open mouth) and the end (closed mouth) of syllable "AUM"<sup>[120][121]</sup>

**A-un**

See also: *Om mani padme hum*

The term **A-un** (阿吽) is the transliteration in Japanese of the two syllables "a" and "hūṃ", written in **Devanagari** as अहूँ. In Japanese, it is often **conflated** with the syllable *Om*. The original Sanskrit term is composed of two letters, the first (अ) and the last (ह) letters of the Devanagari **abugida**, with **diacritics** (including **anusvara**) on the latter indicating the "-ūṃ" of "hūṃ". Together, they symbolically represent the beginning and the end of all things.<sup>[122]</sup> In Japanese **Mikkyō** Buddhism, the letters represent the beginning and the end of the universe.<sup>[123]</sup> This is comparable to **Alpha and Omega**, the first and last letters of the **Greek alphabet**, similarly adopted by **Christianity** to symbolise Christ as the beginning and end of all.

The term *a-un* is used figuratively in some Japanese expressions as "*a-un* breathing" (阿吽の呼吸, *a-un no kokyū*) or "*a-un* relationship" (阿吽の仲, *a-un no naka*), indicating an inherently harmonious relationship or **nonverbal communication**.

### **Niō guardian kings and komainu lion-dogs**

*Main articles: Niō and Komainu*

The term is also used in **Buddhist architecture** and **Shinto** to describe the paired statues common in Japanese religious settings, most notably the **Niō** (仁王) and the **komainu** (狛犬).<sup>[122]</sup> One (usually on the right) has an open mouth regarded by Buddhists as symbolically speaking the "A" syllable; the other (usually on the left) has a closed mouth, symbolically speaking the "Un" syllable. The two together are regarded as saying "A-un". The general name for statues with an open mouth is *agyō* (阿形; lit. "a" shape), that for those with a closed mouth *ungyō* (吽形; lit. "'un' shape").<sup>[122]</sup>

**Niō** statues in Japan, and their equivalent in East Asia, appear in pairs in front of Buddhist **temple gates** and **stupas**, in the form of two fierce looking guardian kings (**Vajrapani**).<sup>[120][121]</sup>

**Komainu**, also called lion-dogs, found in Japan, Korea and China, also occur in pairs before Buddhist temples and public spaces, and again, one has an open mouth (*Agyō*), the other closed (*Ungyō*).<sup>[124][125][126]</sup>

### **Some *a-un* pairs**

•

An *ungyō* komainu

•

An *agyō* komainu

•

*Ungyō* Niō at the Central Gate of Hōryū-ji

Agyō Niō at the Central Gate of Hōryū-ji

## Sikhism

Main article: [Ik Onkar](#)



*Ik Onkar* of Sikhism

*Ik Onkar* (Punjabi: ਇੱਕ ਓੰਕਾਰ; iconically represented as ੴ) are the first words of the [Mul Mantar](#), which is the opening verse of the [Guru Granth Sahib](#), the Sikh scripture.<sup>[127]</sup> Combining the numeral one ("*Ik*") and "*Onkar*", *Ik Onkar* literally means "one *Om*";<sup>[128][L]</sup> these words are a statement that there is "one God",<sup>[129]</sup> understood to refer to the "absolute [monotheistic](#) unity of God"<sup>[127]</sup> and implying "singularity in spite of the seeming multiplicity of existence".<sup>[130][M]</sup>

According to Pashaura Singh, *Onkar* is used frequently as invocation in Sikh scripture; it is the foundational word (*shabad*), the seed of Sikh scripture, and the basis of the "whole creation of time and space".<sup>[131]</sup>

*Ik Onkar* is a significant [name of God](#) in the [Guru Granth Sahib](#) and [Gurbani](#), states Kohli, and occurs as "*Aum*" in the [Upanishads](#) and where it is understood as the abstract representation of three worlds (*Trailokya*) of [creation](#).<sup>[132][N]</sup> According to Wazir Singh, *Onkar* is a "variation of *Om* (*Aum*) of the ancient Indian scriptures (with a change in its orthography), implying the unifying *seed-force* that evolves as the universe".<sup>[133]</sup> [Guru Nanak](#) wrote a poem entitled *Onkar* in which, states Doniger, he "attributed the origin and sense of speech to the Divinity, who is thus the *Om-maker*".<sup>[127]</sup>

*Onkar* ('the Primal Sound') created [Brahma](#), *Onkar* fashioned the consciousness,  
From *Onkar* came mountains and ages, *Onkar* produced the [Vedas](#),  
By the grace of *Onkar*, people were saved through the divine word,  
By the grace of *Onkar*, they were liberated through the teachings of the Guru.

—Ramakali Dakkhani, [Adi Granth](#) 929-930, Translated by Pashaura Singh<sup>[131]</sup>

"Onkar" is the primordial sound/word. It is the soundless word (*anahat naad* or *anahad naad*). It is both the source as well as manifestation of the source. "Onkar" pervades the entire creation. The soundless sound is present everywhere and inside everything including us. In Sikhism, the Guru

Granth Sahib is manifested form of this "Onkar". Hence, the Guru Granth Sahib is called "Shabad Guru". Shabad (word) is Guru and Guru itself is the Primordial Sound "Onkar" (God).<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Thelema

For both symbolic and [numerological](#) reasons, [Aleister Crowley](#) adapted *aum* into a [Thelemic magical formula](#), *AUMGN*, adding a silent 'g' (as in the word '[gnosis](#)') and a nasal 'n' to the *m* to form the [compound letter](#) 'MGN'; the 'g' makes explicit the silence previously only implied by the terminal 'm' while the 'n' indicates nasal vocalisation connoting the breath of life and together they connote knowledge and generation. Together these letters, *MGN*, have a numerological value of [93](#), a number with [polysemic](#) significance in Thelema. *Om* appears in this extended form throughout Crowley's [magical](#) and philosophical writings, notably appearing in the *Gnostic Mass*. Crowley discusses its symbolism briefly in section F of *Liber Samekh* and in detail in chapter 7 of *Magick (Book 4)*.<sup>[134][135][136][137]</sup>

## Modern reception

The Brahmic script *Om*-ligature has become widely recognized in Western [counterculture](#) since the 1960s, mostly in its standard [Devanagari](#) form (ॐ), but the [Tibetan Om](#) (ཨོཾ) has also gained limited currency in popular culture.<sup>[138]</sup>

## In meditation

*Further information:* [Pranava yoga](#)

Meditating and chanting of *Om* can be done by first concentrating on a picture of *Om* and then effortlessly mentally chanting the mantra. Meditating and mental chanting have been said<sup>[by whom?]</sup> to improve the physiological state of the person by increasing alertness and sensory sensitivity.<sup>[139][unreliable source?]</sup>