

# The Eternal Om

by Lila Conway

The sound and symbol of Om (aum) is easily recognisable in the West nowadays, probably due to the increasing popularity of yoga and meditation. Such is its popularity, the symbol Om is often seen not only in places of worship and spiritual practice but on jewellery, clothing, water bottles and now there's even Om chocolate! So... what does it actually mean?

## Om – The Absolute Sound

In their kindness, the Vedas (sacred texts) share the wisdom of creation and how the whole universe evolved from a sound vibration. 'In the beginning was the word', which means primal sound or vibration from which the divine manifests creation. Om is the womb from which everything is born and will in its cycle of nature, also return to. Om (also known as Omkara) consists of three syllables: A, U and M.

## Om – The Trinities

These three syllables also represent the all-pervading energy that creates, preserves and destroys/restores the entire cosmos. **A** (aah) represents Brahma (the creator); **U** (ooo) represents Vishnu (the preserver) and **M** (mmm) represents Siva (the destroyer). 'A' also represents the physical plane; 'U' the mental and astral planes; 'M' represents the deep sleep state and all that is unknown and beyond the reach of the intellect. Om stands for many threefold experiences such as past-present-future, birth-life-death, waking-dreaming-deep sleep, father-son-holy ghost, body-mind-soul, Sat(truth)-Chit(consciousness)-Ananda(bliss) and so on...

## Om – The Sacred Symbol

Om is a Sanskrit letter, the long lower curve stands for the dream

state, the upper curve represents the waking state and the curve in the centre symbolises deep, dreamless sleep. The crescent shape stands for 'Maya' the veil of illusion and the dot for the transcendental state. When the individual spirit in man passes through the veil and rests in the transcendental, he is liberated from the three states and their qualities. Om as a symbol was formed from the sound vibration Om. The great Yoga Master Swami Sivananda proved this with an experiment where his devotees chanted Om continuously - for many hours - down a long tube into a pit of sand. Eventually, through the sound vibration of the mantra Om, the symbol itself formed within the sand.

## Om – The Power of Chanting

At the beginning and end of a yoga class or meditation practice, the Om mantra is usually chanted three times. The sound vibration of the mantra purifies not only the energy of the room/space but the energy of the person chanting. The sound vibrations resonate throughout the whole body, creating a calm and peaceful state of body and mind. For those days when you are feeling a little low, sit and chant 'Om' loudly in succession, with long breaths for twenty minutes or more. This practice will relax every atom in the body, making the mind serene and full of lightness, vitality and strength. You can also repeat the Mantra mentally: this will have very purifying effects.

Om is contained within the word 'hOMe'... chanting Om brings us back to our eternal home and the realisation of our true blissful Self.

*"Om: this eternal word is all: what was, what is and what shall be"* Mandukya Upanishad

## Om Chanting Meditation

Chanting Om should be slow and when recited properly it will naturally bring you into a meditative state. Remember you are not just reciting a sound or phrase, you are creating a vibration within the body, mind and energy. The approximate time for chanting an Om (AUM) mantra is 10 seconds... here's a break down to help you.

**A** – 4 seconds (*pronounced 'oo'*)

**U** – 4 seconds

**M** – 2 seconds

**Practice Tips:** Sit in a comfortable, preferably cross-legged position, keep your spine straight and body relaxed.

Inhale deeply for about 5 seconds. With one continuous exhalation, chant:

- ✿ A for 4 seconds with rounded open lips
- ✿ U for 4 seconds, partially close the lips
- ✿ M for 2 seconds with lips completely closed
- ✿ Chant loudly (it's for your neighbours' good too!) for up to 20 minutes or more. Or alternatively, continue chanting for a few minutes and then begin to gradually quieten down the sound of the mantra until there is no external sound, and you are mentally repeating Om.

- ✿ Focus your awareness on the Ajna Chakra (3rd eye, in between the eyebrows) and continue with the mental repetition of Om.
- ✿ If your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to focusing on the mantra and the Ajna Chakra.
- ✿ Begin with around 10 minutes of practice daily and gradually increase up to half an hour or more.

For more details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, visit: [www.yogaprema.org](http://www.yogaprema.org)

*"Let Om be the bow, mind the arrow and Higher Consciousness the target. Those who want enlightenment should reflect on the sound and meaning of Om. When the arrow is released from the bow, it goes straight to the target"*

*Dhyana Bindu Upanishad*

