



In Yoga 'Om' is regarded to be the primal sound of the universe, its repetition connecting us to the underlying vibration of life. It is often known as the 'Pravana' meaning 'to salute or praise', due to its sacred nature.

Om or Aum?

When pronouncing Om, we are in essence pronouncing the word 'home' without the 'h' sound and we can simply pronounce it as one short sound.

In Sanskrit however the 'O' is what is called a diphthong where the sound starts with a particular vowel then changes into another vowel. In the case of Om, we start with an 'a' sound as in the word 'saw' and complete with a 'u' sound as in the word 'put' meaning when we pronounce Om we start with 'a' and smoothly transfer into 'u' as one vowel sound, the completing with the sound 'm'. This is why the word is often written as 'Aum'.

When chanting we ideally spend an equal time for the au and the m, so it will be 'aaummm' rather than 'aummmm' where the 'm' is over emphasized. We also need to allow the sound to begin vibrating within the navel area and to continue upwards to the nostrils.

You may find it is easier to work with a longer Om when vocally repeating the mantra and when working mentally the length of the mantra is likely to be shorter. It is also possible to focus upon ajna chakra whilst working with this mantra.

What is the significance of Om?

All of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are very special because they create very specific energetic effects when spoken or chanted, meaning for Sanskrit words there is always a direct correlation between the sound and the meaning, i.e. the energetic effect of the sound supports the meaning. For example the word shanti is energetically supportive of its meaning of peace, its energetic effect being inherently soothing and releasing, so when we say or think the word shanti we are in fact creating peace.

Sanskrit words also tell us something of the meaning of the word so for instance the word for cat is 'majara' meaning 'that which plays with a mouse' or the word for the manifested universe is 'jagat', which when we look at its etymology literally means 'is born, goes, that is all' indicating how the very nature of the world is transience.

For AUM the three letters indicate the nature of Brahman or the universe:

- **'A'** as the first letter of the sanskrit alphabet serves to help manifest, it is opening & beginning
- **'U'** as the middle letter of the sanskrit alphabet serves to give it force and consistency in manifestation
- **'M'** as the final letter of the sanskrit alphabet is a closing or completion

We can see this process at the macrocosmic level as indicated by the trinity of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer. Also, on a more microcosmic level it echoes the process of creation, manifestation and destruction/completion we are involved

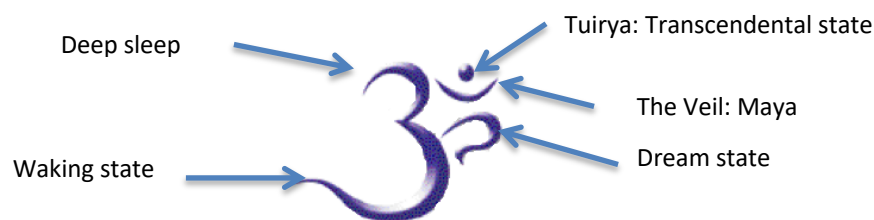
in everyday where for instance a thought arises, manifests and falls away or a flower buds, blooms and withers, and so forth.

So:

- 'A' evokes joy & purpose, radiates power & creativity
- 'U' expands, continues, nourishes, and disseminates the energy & power you have opened to, allowing it to blossom
- 'M' completes the process, creates the boundary, the containment, and both grounds and gives birth to all that we have inspired & generated

The symbol of Om

This symbol possesses many levels of meaning and one important one is the way in which it symbolises the four levels of consciousness where if we look at the symbol then we have the three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and sleeping depicted, along with the state of Tuirya beyond these:.



There are many references to OM in the classical texts, see:

Patanjali Yoga Sutras translated by Swami Satichidananda

- Chapter One, verses 27 to 29

The Upanishads translated by Eknath Easwaran

- Chandogya Upanishad: Chapter 1
- Mandukya Upanishad
- Prashna Upanishad: Question 5
- Taittiriya Upanishad: Part 1, verse 8

