

AUM: The Healing Power

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Abstract—Globalization, industrialization and modernization epitomize the extreme disconnection of man from himself, and his fellow man. The oppression/ domination of women, who is man's complementary half creates a serious inequity, which is manifested in the exploitation of Mother Earth. The cruelty and exploitation of children jeopardize and threaten human being's entire future. In light of these current states of affairs, and the multitude of complex crisis in the world, there is a vital call for to bring cosmic parameter in human interactions. Each of us has to groom ourselves and contribute to the process of bringing wisdom into our lives and through that to our communities. It's widely acknowledged that yoga, meditation and other practices that engross conscious relaxation can make subtle positive difference in our lives and can enhance a person's general well being that ultimately effectuate positive changes in the world. Over the time, the chanting of AUM has been popularized and became an integral part of meditation. The sacred syllable has been proven to impart a definite measure of peace, calmness, tranquility, serenity and purification to the mind and soul. From sages to yoga followers to monks, everyone chants this Sanskrit syllable for numerous benefits. The AUM mantra has astounding spiritual, medical and healing benefits that can help to reduce the stress gathered in the minds of people living in this mega modern and hectic life. Therefore the objective of my paper is to highlight the relevance/significance of the syllable AUM from ancient Vedic texts and effects of AUM meditation in contemporary science.

The discussion is organized as follows: At the outset, first off all I will ponder over the vital question: Why AUM? While answering the question I will emphasize the uniqueness of AUM being the humming sound of this cosmic universe. Secondly, I will talk about the origin and historical background of the sacred syllable AUM. Then in the next two sections, primarily I will explain the meaning and symbolism of AUM with special reference to Mandukya Upanishad followed up by the relevance of AUM in Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism and in the epic Bhagavad Gita. Finally sum up, by focusing on the valuable holistic benefits of chanting AUM while doing meditation in our daily life.

Design/methodology/approach -The paper will be analytical/logical in nature and the data for this study has been collected from the primary sources like: Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishad, Katha Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad, Bhagavad-Gita, Yoga Sutra of Patanjali and secondary sources, which includes books, magazines, journals, periodicals and different websites.

Findings-. In this paper I will try to showcase the glory, power, efficacy and miracles of chanting AUM.

Research limitations/implications- Theoretical research.

Practical implications- To include the chanting of AUM mantra in our daily routine in order to have overall holistic benefits: healing, philosophical, mystical, psychological and spiritual.

Originality/value- To put emphasis to include the meditation/chanting of AUM in our daily routine in order to have overall holistic development.

Keywords: AUM, Udgitha, Omkara, Ekakshara, Pranava, Turiya.

1. INTRODUCTION

The syllable Om, also known as *Aum*, *Udgitha*, *Omkara*, *Ekakshara* and *Pranava*, is the most religious symbol of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. It is used both as a symbol and as a sound in spiritual worship, religious ceremony, performance of rituals, yogic and tantric practices. In Hinduism it is referred as *Brāhman* in the form of syllable (*askshara*) and sound (*nada*). In actual practice it is hardly ever recited in segregation and mostly in alliance with other mantras, religious prayers, either as a suffix or a prefix, under the conviction that doing so would boost their strength, vitality, purity and sanctity.

2. WHY AUM?

Since ages, Indians have believed in the supremacy of chanting the sacred syllable *AUM*, which is generally referred to as Hindu's sacred symbol. For many of us, it may be just a word created out of our rich mythological/legendary past. But we will be astonished to know that even scientific research has now agreed with the outstanding healing, philosophical, mystical, psychological and spiritual benefits that we acquire from chanting *AUM*.

If we recite the syllable *AUM* without using our tongue, we will feel a certain amount of vibration/pulsation in our body. According to Vedas and even if we observe the nature of sound we'll find that all the ordinary audible sounds are produced by the striking of two objects like: drumstick striking a drum head, two vocal cords, wind rustling the tree leaves, raindrops falling on leaves, clearing your thought, tiers against the road etc. In short all sounds that are within audible range are produced by visible or invisible object, vibrating or striking each other, resulting in pulsating waves of air molecules that we decode as sound.

On the contrary, the sound of *AUM* is not a result of vibration or striking of two objects. It develops on its own. It is believed to be the humming sound of the universe that encompasses all the sounds within itself. Moreover, meditating on *AUM* mantra can bring us closer to other human beings and lift the veil of detachment. Further, we can get many valuable benefits by chanting this *AUM* like:

- It drives away all worldly thoughts and removes diversion and infuses new energy in the body.
- It makes the mind tranquil and sharp, and infuses the religious credentials, which ensure self-realization.
- It swings us out of our usual discursive mind and into a more meditative mode.
- It validates oneness and harmony in life.
- It helps to reduce stress, improves concentration, and gives positive energy and many more.

3. ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *AUM*

The origin of the word '*AUM*' is wholly indecisive. There are many theories concerning its origin. It has been traced to a pronominal base "av" and its formation has been compared with of ay-am, "this". But the evidence in support of this view is quite inadequate. It does not appear at all in the *Rigveda*, but it is mentioned in the other Vedas and several Upanishads allied with them. Primarily, in the early Vedic period, because of the sacredness allied with it, the word was kept as a secret and never voiced in public domain. It was used in private discussions and passed on from teacher to student or father to son directly and in secrecy. It was also not used in the rituals.

We find its increasing popularity in many Upanishads that were composed in the Post *Rigvedic* period such as *Chandogya*, *Brihadaranyaka*, *Taittiriya*, *Katha* and *Mandukya Upanishads*. These Upanishads draw its symbolic importance by linking it with the Ultimate Reality or Supreme *Brāhman*. They directly refer to it as *Om*, *Aum*, *Udgita*, *Pranava* and *Omkaara*.

4. MEANING OF *AUM*

AUM is made up of three syllables: A, U, and M, or, phonetically, "aaah," "oooh," and "mmm." A is the first of the guttural sound, so it is the very first sound that man can utter, M is the last of the labial sounds and U is the sound produced by rolling the wind over the whole of the tongue. Hence the conjunction of these three primary sounds can be comprehended to contain the rudiment of all sounds that man can ever give utterance to and so it can be taken as the fittest sound symbol of Brahman.

Moreover, the syllable *AUM* represents several important triads: Worlds - Earth, Atmosphere, and Heaven; Major Hindu Gods - Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva; Gunas: Tamas, Rajas and

Sattva; Sacred Vedic scriptures - *Rg*, *Yajur*, and *Sama*; Actions: Creation, Preservation, and Destruction; Time: Past, Present, and Future; Stages of survival: Birth, Life, and Death; Elemental Deity: Fire (*Agni*), Sun (*Aditya*), Wind (*Vayu*).

5. SYMBOLISM OF *AUM*

Just as the sound of *AUM* represents the above-mentioned triads as well the sound of Brahman, the visual symbol of *AUM* written in Sanskrit also represents everything. The symbol of *AUM* contains three curves, one arc/semicircle and a bindu/dot. Each aspect of its appearance is said to symbolize something deeper. First of all it symbolizes human figure: the large lower curve represent the lower part of the human form, the upper curve represents upper part, the third curve which lies between the two curves represents arms (*bhujaya*) and the semicircle with dot represents head (mind) of the human form. Similarly the symbol also represents four states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep and *turiya*) and four types of soul (*vaishvanara*, *tajasa*, *prajna* and *atman*), which we will discuss in length with reference to *Mandukya Upanishad* in the next point.

6. *AUM* IN *MANDUKYA UPANISHAD*

Mandukya Upanishad is the shortest Upanishad comprises of twelve verses about the syllable *AUM*, the four states of consciousness and the four aspects of soul. It open by declaring that the syllable *AUM* is this whole world and thereafter the rest of the discussion is based on a structure of four-fold, derived from A+ U + M + Silence. In *Mandukya Upanishad*, Verses from 1-2 describe the Self and the Absolute, verses from 3-7 explain the four levels of consciousness and verses from 8-12 outline the four aspects of *AUM*.

The visual symbol of *AUM* symbolizes the four states of consciousness and four types of soul in the following manner:

- **The lower curve** represents the Gross realm of the universe, Conscious processing level of the mind, Waking state of consciousness, *Vaishvanara* aspect of the soul (A sound of *AUM* Mantra).
- **The center curve** represents the Subtle realm of the universe, Unconscious processing level of the mind, and Dreaming state of consciousness, *Tajasa* aspect of the soul (U sound of *AUM* Mantra).
- **The upper curve** represents the Causal realm of the universe, Subconscious processing level of the mind, and Deep Sleep state of consciousness, *Prajna* aspect of the soul (M sound of *AUM* Mantra).
- **The dot, point, or bindu** represents the fourth state of absolute consciousness, which includes and infuses the other three levels and is called *Turiya*. (Silence of *AUM* Mantra)

- **The arc/semicircle** below the dot symbolizes *Maya* and detached the bindu from the other three curves. The arc is open from the top, which means that the absolute is infinite and is not influenced by *Maya*. *Maya* only influence the manifested phenomenon. In this way the form of '*AUM*' symbolizes the Ultimate Reality Brahman and the entire cosmos.

7. RELEVANCE OF AUM IN BUDDHISM, JAINISM, SIKHISM AND THE EPIC BHAGAVAD-GITA

7.1 Buddhism

In Buddhism, *AUM* is often placed at the beginning of mantras. Probably the most well-known lotus mantra begins with *AUM* and is chanted as “*Om Mani Padma Hum*”. For the Buddhists the syllable *AUM* neither represents the absolute reality nor an eternal self. Instead it represents the outer aspects of a human being, namely the body, the speech and the mind respectively.

7.2 Jainism

In Jainism, *AUM* is considered as a short form of the initials of the five *Parameshthis*: *Arihanta*, *Ashiri*, *Acharya*, *Upadhyaya* and *Munis*.

7.3 Sikhism

AUM plays a prominent role in Sikhism also. The Sikh prayer, known as the Mool mantra, starts with the idiom, *Ek Onkar* (meaning “God is One”). *Ek Onkar* is the root basis of all Sikh holy thought, and the first phrase of the Sikh Guru embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib.

7.4 Bhagavad-Gita

According to *Bhagavad-Gita* there is a harmony, tranquility and bliss in this simple but deeply philosophical sound and while chanting it, if one thinks of the Ultimate Reality and relinquish his body, he will certainly reach the highest state of "stateless" eternity.

8. MEDITATION AND CHANTING OF AUM

Chanting *AUM* unite us to all that is living, to human beings, to nature, to the cosmos. Moreover, in order to have fruitful benefits of *AUM* mantra, pronunciation and technique of chanting *AUM* should be appropriate.

8.1 Pronunciation of Aum

AUM when correctly pronounced is said to have four sounds: A + U + M + Silence; “A” emerges from the gullet, in the navel region, “U” rolls over the tongue, and “M” ends on the lips. The last sound is of silence. The rhythmic pronunciation of *AUM* makes the mind tranquil and focused to attain our goal.

8.2 Technique for Chanting AUM

We should sit cross-legged with an upright posture, with our spine, head and neck aligned. Close our eyes and inhale deeply and release our breath while executing the chant. Repeating this three times will allow us to feel the vibration of the *AUM* sound resonating through every single cell in our body.

9. VALUABLE AND HOLISTIC BENEFITS OF CHANTING AUM

- It purifies the environment around us and creates positive sensations.
- It is not only beneficial for the person who is chanting it but also to the people around them wherever its vibrations flow, it cleanses our aura and charged up the entire vicinity with vigor energy.
- It places us in a meditational state and gives us deep relaxation.
- It relaxes and rejuvenates the mind, which improves and increases our concentration level and helps us to be focused.
- It controls our emotions, desires and feelings, thus allowing us to observe situations with a clear and rational mind.
- When the *AUM* Mantra is chanted in a group, the effects are amplified.
- It helps us in getting rid of negativity.
- It can also leads to ultimate self-realization.

10. SCIENTIFIC STUDY ON AUM

Chanting of *AUM* leads to mental and physical benefits to the body, as it slows down the nervous system and tranquil the mind in a way just like meditation. Through the rhythmic pronunciation, the mind is relaxed and blood pressure reduces, eventually resulting in an improvement in heart health. In today’s scenario scientific experiments/studies has proven the fact that, “meditation/chanting of *AUM* is a remedy to stress and therapeutic to many more mental and physical health problems. Some of the scientific benefits of chanting *AUM* are given below:

- *AUM* chanting is an effective tonic, which increases the competence of the human organism in a profound manner.
- It increases the production of endorphin so making us feeling relaxed and refreshed every time.
- It has a positive effect for cardiac vascular health by lowering blood pressure and increasing competence of all the cells and organs in the body.

- It relieves the stress levels by delivering more oxygen to the body.
- It removes toxin from our body and give us strong immunity and self-healing power.
- It also helps in reducing weight as it puts our entire body in a heightened state of sensitivity and its sensations stimulate our metabolism.
- It strengthened our spinal cord because of the vibrations caused by sound of 'Aaaa' that is generated from our abdomen.
- It is beneficial for the thyroid glands and the throat because of the sound 'Uuuu' created by vocal cords.
- It is also said that rubbing our hands jointly while chanting *AUM* and putting those charged hands on different parts of body, it will heal or activates those body parts. For eg. If that energy charged hands are put on our eyes, our eyesight will start improving.

11. CONCLUSION

After such a detailed outline, we can say that chanting of *AUM* continuously would bring many benefits, such as cleansing of the mind, the body and the nature, elimination of the sins, calmness of the mind, eradication of desires, delusion and attachment and attainment of all the four pursuits of human life, namely *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* and many more physical and mental health benefits as mentioned above.

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