



OM

Repeating the word *Om*, pronounced Aum, is often done as an aid toward meditation. When we concentrate on a sound or *Mantra* it becomes our point of focus. In India, *Om* is the oldest and most sacred of the *Mantras*. It is a *Bija Mantra*, a seed sound, a very simple sound that represents a much more complex concept. It is said to contain the vibration of all things. Chanting the sound of *Om* brings us into harmony with our inner selves, with all beings and with nature around us. We are always searching for this state of harmony. We use terms like out of sync, bad vibrations, not in harmony, feeling discord, out of whack, off balance, disconnected etc. to explain the lack of harmony we sometimes feel in ourselves, or see in others. When we practice chanting the sound of *Om*, we may become more fully present or mindful and enter into a state of inner peace. Time drops away, the field of consciousness clears, and we open to the present moment. The symbol or written word for *Om*, as with other Sanskrit words, has deeper meaning or story behind it. Here is a brief explanation:

- ① Looking at the Sanskrit word for *Om*, you see a small dot at the top. This dot represents the *Seer* or the inner person, the oneness within. When we are first born we have no identity established; we are nameless and new. We are just the *Seer*, pure and untouched by the physical circumstances of this life to come.
- ② Below the Dot there is a slash that represents the *Samskara*, the veil of illusion. This is the sum of all the identities we accumulate as we go through life. When we are first born our parents and family relate to us in certain ways, depending on how we behave. If we are mellow and happy we are considered an “easy baby”, if we are irritable and tearful we are a “fussy baby”. As we grow, we take on many more identities: daughter, son, good student or bad student, teacher, professional, mother, father, grandparent, mentor, businessperson. The list goes on and on. We need these labels or identities to function well in life and society, but as time goes on we feel that we “are” the sum of our identities. But in fact, some of these labels we have picked up are not even truly indicative of who we are. Perhaps we have grown beyond the label, perhaps the label was never real, possibly the label was imposed on us by our parents or friends and never gave a true view of who we are or were. For example, if a child's parents label the child a "bad" child, that child may live out the label, even if it was never a true representation of the child. We may live out our lives being the person someone else has labeled, yet it may not be or ever have been a true representation of who we really are or could become. Through meditation, yoga, and chanting *Om* we may come to see our inner and very real and beautiful self, the self that has always been there and is independent of the many identities we accumulate as we travel through life.
- ③ The upper left loop of the symbol below the *Samskara* represents our conscious awake state.
- ④ The lower loop on the left represents a sleeping state.
- ⑤ The loop off to the right represents a deep and dreamless state of sleep.

The symbol of *Om* is a symbol of a person's life. We spend our days in a state of wakefulness or sleep. All of our activities may be determined, more or less, by our *Samskara*, our veil of illusion. If we can spend time each day in a state of mindful quiet, whether in yoga or meditation or chanting the sound of *Om*, we may break through the veil of illusion and begin to realize the perfection that resides within, always available to us, unchanged by time or circumstance.

