

Aum

**by Hadji-Erinn (M.S.T.) (likely William Q. Judge)
translated by Thos. Williams, F.T.S.**

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AUM is the most sacred and mysterious syllable of the Vedas. It is the first letter of the Sanscrit alphabet, and it is said to be the first sound produced by the breath of a new-born child. The daily prayers of the Brahmins begin and end with this word; according to the sacred books, it is the word which the gods themselves use when calling on the great Unknown One.

In the Kandogya Upanishad we find its praises set forth in the following words: " Man, meditate on the word one called *udgita*; (2) it is the best of all [Page 17] essences — the supreme one — that which holds the place of honour, the eighth".

He is then recommended to meditate on this syllable as representing the two kinds of breath which animates the body. The vital breath and the ordinary breath of the mouth or lungs for this meditation provokes wisdom and the perfect accomplishment of the sacrifice. We read in verse 10: " It would therefore seem that both he who knows the real meaning of one and he who is ignorant of it perform the same sacrifice. But this is not the case, for knowledge and ignorance are two different things. The sacrifice is more powerful if we make it by the aid of science, faith, and the Upanishad."

Outwardly, both accomplish the same thing, but he who is wise, having meditated on the hidden meaning of Om, gives to his actions the qualities inherent in Om, which requires this psychic force to be able to manifest itself and become active. When a jeweller and a peasant sell a precious stone, the knowledge of the first must produce a better result than the want of it in the latter.

Sanbaracharya, in his " Sharir Bhashya," treats at length of the syllable Om, and devotes to its consideration a whole chapter of the Vayu Purana. As Vayu means air, it is easy to understand the mental attitude of those who occupy themselves with this Purana. They analyse the sound, an analysis which should discover some interesting relations as existing between the physical and spiritual constitution of man. Sound possesses tone, and tone in nature possesses supreme importance and profound meaning. It is by inarticulate cries that man in his incipient state of early childhood expresses his sentiments, and that animals proclaim their distinctive characters; the voice of a tiger differs from that of a tortoise; the tones of the voices of the animal world differ as much from one another as their natures, and possess meanings which distinguish different objects; the study of the laws which lie hidden under these different sounds cannot be considered puerile if it leads to the distinguishing of fundamental characteristics descriptive of the nature of animal life.

The Padma Purana says: "The word Om is the queen of prayers; it should, therefore, be pronounced at the beginning of all prayers"; and the laws of Manu order that "a Brahmin should always pronounce the syllable Om at the beginning and end of the reading of a lesson in the Vedas. For if Om does not begin it then the meaning will escape him; and if Om does not end it, then nothing will be retained for any length of time".

This is what the celebrated Raja Ramohun Roy says in treating of this subject: "Om, considered as only one letter, and pronounced by one articulation, symbolises the supreme Spirit. One letter (one) is the emblem of the Most High. (Mann ii., 83.) But considered as a three-lettered word, made up of *a u m*, it symbolises the three Vedas, the three states of the nature of man, [Page 18] the three divisions of the universe, the three gods Brahma, Vishnou, and Siva, which are the agents of creation, conservation, and destruction on earth; or, more properly speaking, the three attributes of the Supreme Being personified by these divinities. In this sense it implies that the Universe is under the control of the Supreme Being."

We may picture to ourselves the immensity of universal space as traversed by a simple and homogeneous vibration of sound which acts with an awakening and vivifying energy, and rouses into motion every molecule of ether. This is represented in every language by the vowel *a*, which takes precedence over all the others. This is the word, the verbum, the logos of the Christian's St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". (St. John, chap. i., v.l.) It is Creation, for without this resonance, without this movement amongst the quiescent molecules, there would have been no visible universe. That is to say, on this sound, or as the Aryans call it, this *Nadu Brahma* (divine resonance) depends the evolution of the visible from the invisible.

But this sound *a*, as soon as it is produced, becomes transformed into *au*, so that the second sound, *u*, is that which the first produces through the continuation of its own being. The vowel *u*, a compound one itself, represents, therefore, conservation. And the idea of conservation is entirely contained in that of creation, because nothing which had not previously come into existence could be preserved. If these two sounds, combined in one, could be indefinitely prolonged, we should do away with the nature of destruction. But they can only be continued for the duration of one respiration, and whether we press our lips together, the tongue against the roof of the mouth, or make use of those organs which lie further back, there must always be a closing in at its finish like the sound of the letter *m*, which, with the Aryans, received the signification of a "stoppage"; and with this final letter we have the destruction of the whole word or letter. We can quickly prove experimentally that it is impossible to utter the letter *m* without first opening the mouth and thus emitting the two vowels *au*. Without fear of contradiction, we may assert that every word commences with *au* and ends with *m*. The word tone is derived from the Latin and Greek words signifying sound, and possessing also another signification. In Greek the word *tonos* means the act of spreading or radiating. While in its general character the word tone is used indifferently to characterise high notes, low notes, sharp and flat, or soft and hard ones, in music it shows the quality of the sound produced, and is employed in alluding to the difference of pitch between two instruments. In medicine it is used to denote a physical state, such as that of strength, elasticity, or tension. We can easily reconcile this physical meaning of the word to that divine resonance of which we have spoken, for we can consider tension to apply to the vibration or quantity of vibration which [Page 19] allows the ear to perceive a sound, and if the whole organism were gradually to weaken until it became non-existent, the result obtained would be a dissolution of this collection of molecules.

In painting, tone indicates the general character of a work; and the same may be said of morals and

customs. We say "*bon ton*"; the English use the expression "high-toned sentiments", "a general tone of politeness"; so that we find the meaning of this word applicable to both good and evil, to the supremely great and the infinitely little. The only letter capable of expressing all this is the sound *a*, modified in different ways, as *long*, *short*, or *medium*. Just as the tone of manners, morals, of painting, and of music means their true characteristics, in the same way tones of different animals, including man, express their real character; and all these together, combined in the deep murmur which nature throws up, swells into the Nada Brahma, the divine resonance, that which we call the music of the spheres.

Meditating on the tone, as expressed in the Sanscrit syllable, Om leads us to the knowledge of the secret doctrine. In the human voice we find the seven divisions of the Divine essence for the microcosm, being a copy of the macrocosm; our halting measures contain collectively that of the whole, in the seven notes of the scale. This brings us to the seven colours, and so on, step by step, from stage to stage, until we reach the divine radiation itself, or Aum. For this divine resonance of which we have spoken is not actually the same as Divine light in its perfection. Resonance is but the expression of the complete sound Aum, which continues for, according to what the Hindous term, the duration of a day, and night of Brahma, and which they give as 1,000 ages. It not only acts as the force which excites and animates the molecules of the universe, but also as an incitement to the evolution and dissolution of man, and of the animal and mineral kingdoms and solar systems. In the planetary system, the Aryans represented this force by Mercury, which has always been held to represent the ruler of the intellectual faculties and stimulator of universal life. Some old authors mention that it is pictured in the skies by Mercury and reproduced in humanity in the universal chatter of women.

Wherever the divine resonance has been stopped by death or other changes, Aum has been intoned. These expressions of Aum are simply the innumerable microscopic utterances of the word, which is only completely pronounced and finished, according to mystical and hermetic language, when the great Brahm ceases to breathe, and ends his word with the sound *m* causing universal dissolution. This universal dissolution is known in Sanscrit and in the secret doctrine by the name of Maha Pralaya, or Grand Dissolution. Having pronounced the sacred syllable, the ancient Rishes of India said, "Nothing either begins or ends; all is change, and that which we call death is transformation". [Page 20]

These words, applied to manifested life, the so-called death of a sensible creature means only the transforming of energy, the changing of manner and place in the manifestation of the Divine Resonance. So that we see that even in these early ages of the history of our race, the doctrine of conservation of energy was known and applied.

The Divine Resonance, or the sound *au*, the universal energy which remains constant in quality during the continuation of each day of Brahma, and which, when the great night falls, is reabsorbed in the All. Appearing and disappearing continually, it transforms itself incessantly, covered at intervals by the veil of matter, which we call its invisible manifestation, and which is never lost, but is always changing one aspect for another.

We may now comprehend both the beauty and the utility shown in the construction of Sanscrit words. Nada Brahma is the divine resonance; if, after having pronounced the word Nada, with the word Brahm, we should naturally conclude that the final *m* symbolised the Pralaya, and this would contradict our hypothesis that the divine resonance is everlasting, for if it stops it is lost. For this reason an *a* is added to

the end of the word Brahm in order to indicate that under the title of Brahma the second will continue to exist. But space is wanting in which to examine this question as we should like to. and these few allusions have no other aim than to indicate the real and practical meaning of Aum.

For us, Om is a real and living fact. It represents the continuous *courant* of that silent meditation which man should follow, even while occupying himself with the duties and necessities of life. There is one constant effort common to all finite beings towards a given end, and this we do not even confine to them alone, but include the whole animal kingdom; for these inferior beings only await their turn to evolve to a superior condition, and unconsciously, perhaps, but none the less effectively, do they assimilate the same nourishment.

"Having grasped the bow, the mighty weapon, place upon the string the arrow pointed by devotion. Then, drawing it, aim, oh! my friend, at the mark, directing your thoughts to the Indestructible. Om is the bow, the Ego is the arrow, Brahma is the mark. He who hits shall be free from illusion, and, then, as the arrow becomes one with the might of its energy of projection, it will become one with Brahmam. Learn that he alone is the true Ego and renounce all other words. He is the bridge which leads to immortality. Meditate on the *I am I* as Om. All hail to thee, and mayest thou safely traverse the ocean of shadows."