

REVIEW ARTICLE

Om Chanting: A Path to Healing and Spiritual Connection

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received on: 17-01-2025

Accepted on: 14-02-2025

Published on: 28-02-2025

Key words:

Consciousness,

Healing,

Meditation,

Mindfulness,

Om chanting,

Spiritual connection

ABSTRACT

The “Om” mantra is much more than just a sound; it is a “*Mahamantra*,” whose powerful vibrations hold a deep spiritual and cosmic significance. Its chanting aligns the individual with the universe as a whole and the vibrations it generates influence the mind, body, and soul, paving the way for a state of happiness, bliss, and tranquility. This review article explores the history, significance, and scientific evidence examining the role of “Om” chanting in promoting physical, mental and emotional well-being. Across a synthesis of ancient wisdom and contemporary research, we uncover how “Om” chanting serves as a pathway to healing and spiritual connection.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, medical science has made remarkable progress, thanks to significant advancements in the field of technology. These innovations have greatly reduced the burden of infectious diseases and have proven to be a boon for emergency treatments, contributing to the extension of life. However, in contemporary medicine, there is little focus on the prevention of diseases and most treatments suppress symptoms but do not address the root cause of illness. In addition, conventional medicine has failed to effectively tackle the challenge posed by the rising trend of lifestyle-related chronic diseases. Stress from a hectic work schedule and poor lifestyle management is a major contributor to a range of chronic diseases. Prolonged stress, an inherent aspect of modern life, can eventually lead to chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, which are preventable. While modern medicine offers treatments to provide symptomatic relief in these diseases, it does not offer a complete cure. The key to managing stress and enhancing our well-being lies in reconnecting with the spiritual foundations of medicine through the integration of holistic practices that nurture the mind, body, and soul. One such practice, which can

foster a more comprehensive and balanced approach to healing is the chanting of the sacred sound “Om.” Rhythmic repetition of the divine sound “Om” promotes a relaxed, positive state of mind free from anxiety and stress, creating a foundation for optimal physical health.

2. METHODS

The present review article provides a thorough and in-depth analysis of the “Om” mantra, a core concept in ancient spiritual traditions. It references a range of books and scholarly articles to investigate the spiritual significance and benefits associated with “Om” chanting. The data were meticulously collected through an extensive review process, which involved analyzing various texts that delve deeply into the “Om” mantra.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. The “OM” Mahamantra

The “*Mantra*” word is a combination of two syllables, the root “*Man*” which means “to think or recollect,” and “*Tra*” from “*Trai*” means “to protect or liberate” from the bondage of the material world and sufferings caused by ignorance and cycles of birth and death.^[1] Chanting involves quieting the mind through repetition of Mantras and repeated chanting of Mantras fosters inner awareness.^[2,3]

Hundreds of different sounds are used by people in mantra meditation across various traditions. Some of these sounds are universal like

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“Om” in Hindu philosophy, which is regarded as the sound of creation.^[3]

The Vedic scriptures state that at the beginning of creation, God first created sound. Through this sound, He manifested space and continued the process of creation. This primordial sound was the sacred sound “Om,” also known as “*Pranava*” – the sonic manifestation of Brahman.^[4]

It is fascinating to know that astrophysicists have now detected echoes of the “Big Bang” that occurred at the beginning of time. Interestingly, the sound they have identified is a humming noise, strikingly similar to the sound of “Om.”^[3]

The sound “Om” is considered the ultimate sound that represents the essence of this universe; it is imperishable and infinite, just like God Himself. Therefore, it is also referred to as “*anahatnad*.” In Vedic philosophy, it is recognized as the “*mahavakya*,” and is often placed at the beginning of Vedic mantras, serving as the “*bija mantra*.”^[4]

Eight of Upanisads include sections that discuss “Om” and these are: *Katha*, *Mundaka*, *Prasna*, *Taittiriya*, *Chhandogya*, *Brihadaranyaka*, *Mandukya*, and *Svetasvatara* Upanishad. “Om” is also mentioned in the Srimad Bhagwad Gita, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and Gopatha Brahmana.^[5]

The Mandukya Upanishad is one of the key Upanishads that describes the methodology of realizing Brahman as “Om.” It is regarded as the sound that encompasses all of existence, including the past, present, and future. Mandukya Upanishad uses the analogy that “Om” is the bow, the soul is the arrow, and Brahman is the target.^[6]

“Om” chanting has been an integral part of various spiritual practices, especially in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Yoga. Over time, chanting “Om” has transcended religious boundaries, gaining recognition in wellness and therapeutic practices. The Vedas explain that “Om” is composed of three parts represented as “Aum.” These are the phonetic components of the “Om” sound, and each part carries its own specific meaning. The letter “A” (Akar) which represents the conscious state is linked to the deity Brahma, signifying the beginning and creation of the Universe. “U” (Ukar) associated with God Vishnu, symbolizes the dream state and represents the ongoing existence of the Universe. The final sound “M” signifies the state of dreamless sleep for the mind and spirit. It is connected with God, Shiva and it represents the dissolution or destruction of the Universe. The silence that follows the chanting of “Aum” represents the fourth state, which transcends and integrates all these states. The written symbol of “Aum” consisting of three curves, a dot, and a semicircle is also deeply symbolic. The lower curve represents the waking state (A), the middle curve signifies the dream state (U), the upper curve symbolizes the deep dream state (M) and the dot represents the fourth state, Turiya, a state of pure consciousness. The three letters correspond to the three tenses – past, present, and future, while the entire symbol embodies the Creator, who transcends the limitations of time.^[7] Thus, the sacred sound “Om” embodies the essence of existence, offering guidance to those who seek to uncover the profound truths of the Universe.

3.2. Significance of “OM”

Primordial Sound “Om” is often associated with religion, but this is a misconception. In reality, it is a universal sound that connects us to the cosmos. “Om” or “Aum” represents the sound of creation, the rhythm of existence itself. Each syllable signifies a different facet of consciousness, offering a deep spiritual journey. The letter “A” which symbolizes the waking state of consciousness aligns the individual to the vibrant energy and life force. The letter “U” representing the dream

state links us to the creative depths of the subconsciousness. The Letter “M” signifying the deep sleep state brings us into a profound sense of peace and inner tranquility. Beyond these three sounds, the silence that follows represents the fourth state, “Turiya,” a state of pure awareness, that is all encompassing and eternal.^[8]

3.3. Effects of “OM” Chanting

The sacred sound “Om” is a harmonic key that aligns with the vibrational essence of the universe. It is suggested that when “Om” is chanted correctly, then it resonates at a frequency of 136.1 Hz, a frequency which is in harmony with the Earth’s natural rhythm.^[9]

Chanting of the sound “Om” has a remarkable effect on the vocal apparatus of the body. While chanting the letter “A” mouth is opened fully, creating vibrations that resonate deep in our stomach and chest. Then as our lips draw closer together with the letter “U,” the vibration shifts upward, humming through our throat and chest. Finally, our lips close to create “M,” sending the sound’s energy through our nasal passages into the brain. This progression systematically engages our entire vocal apparatus from the larynx to the nasal cavity, creating a complete circuit of sound and vibration.^[9]

“Om” chanting is no longer seen solely in spiritual or religious terms and recent research is uncovering its tangible and measurable impact, especially in terms of relaxation, mental clarity, and brain functions. Studies have employed various techniques, such as heart rate variability, galvanic skin resistance, neuroimaging, electroencephalogram (EEG), and middle latency responses of auditory evoked potential, to explore these effects. One study, using heart rate variability as a measure, found a significant increase in parasympathetic tone after just 5 min of loud “Om” chanting, highlighting its relaxing and calming effects.^[10] Another study examined, autonomic and respiratory variables, such as heart rate, respiratory rate, skin resistance, and finger plethysmography amplitude in seven meditators after they mentally chanted “Om.” The results showed a significant decrease in heart rate and an increase in skin resistance pointing to a state of alert relaxation – one where the body is calm but the mind remains focused and clear.^[11] Acoustic analysis of the divine sound “Om” also indicated its potential as a brain stabilizer and a form of energy medicine, particularly beneficial for individuals under stress.^[12] A comparison of EEG complexity before and after “Om” chanting revealed a reduction in signal complexity, further supporting its calming and stabilizing effects on the brain.^[13]

Many studies have used neuroimaging techniques to explore the effects of “Om” chanting on mental health. One study, using functional near-infrared spectroscopy, found that “Om” chanting, had a protective effect on frontal hemodynamics during a cognitive task, especially after 30 min of exposure to a mobile phone electromagnetic field. A study suggested that “Om” chanting may enhance cognitive functions.^[14] In another study, using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), it was shown that listening to the sound of “Om” activates neural circuits associated with empathetic behavior.^[15] Similarly, a different fMRI study demonstrated significant bilateral deactivation of the limbic system during “Om” chanting in healthy individuals. The researchers concluded that the neurophysiological effects of chanting may be mediated by stimulation of auricular branch of the vagus nerve, a mechanism similar to that observed during vagal nerve stimulation in the treatment for epilepsy and depression.^[16] In addition, a comparison of middle latency response in auditory evoked potential, measured during “Om” meditation and mental repetition of a neutral word, revealed that while neural changes occurred at the diencephalic region in both cases, however, these changes were in the opposite direction as indicated by variations in Na wave peak amplitude.^[17]

A number of scientific studies have investigated the health benefits of “Om” chanting. When chanted in a slow, rhythmic manner, it results in stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system, helping the body to enter a state of relaxation. Studies have demonstrated that “Om” chanting can reduce cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress, leading to improved emotional stability and a greater sense of calm. Previous research indicates that chanting “Om” can help reduce anxiety and foster a sense of calm, making it an effective tool for managing stress.

“Om” chanting is also beneficial in managing symptoms of depression. The resonance of the sound is believed to help clear mental blockages, promoting a sense of clarity and well-being. Through mindfulness and focused breathing, individuals cultivate a meditative state that fosters emotional resilience and mental health.^[18]

4. CONCLUSION

“Om” chanting is more than just a spiritual practice – it has proven therapeutic potential that aligns with modern medicine’s growing emphasis on holistic care. By enhancing mental clarity, promoting relaxation, improving physiological function, and supporting the body’s healing processes, “Om” chanting offers a powerful tool for promoting overall well-being. As further research is conducted, it is likely that this ancient practice will find a more prominent place in contemporary healthcare, providing patients with a complementary and natural approach to healing and wellness.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

6. AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors contributed equally in design and execution of the article.

7. FUNDING

Nil.

8. ETHICAL APPROVALS

This study did not require ethical clearance as it is a review study.

9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

11. PUBLISHERS NOTE

This journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published institutional affiliation

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How to cite this article:

Chaswal M. Om Chanting: A Path to Healing and Spiritual Connection. *IRJAY*. [online] 2025;8(2):36-38.

Available from: <https://irjay.com>

DOI link- <https://doi.org/10.48165/IRJAY.2025.80207>