

The Science of Upanishads – Part 25:

The Significance of Om (ॐ) in Hinduism

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The syllable ॐ is the most important spiritual and sacred symbol of Hinduism. The syllable is found at the beginning and the end of chapters in the Vedas, the Upanishads, and other Hindu scriptures. The symbol is enshrined in every Hindu temple, found at the top of personal and corporate letterheads, in pendants and other ornaments worn by Hindus, and even in contemporary body arts and tattoos. Om symbolizes the most profound concepts of Hindu belief, it is in use daily by most followers of Hinduism. Many Hindus begin their day or any work or journey by uttering Om. It represents both the unmanifest (*nirguna*) and manifest (*saguna*) aspects of the Absolute Truth, the Brahman. That is why it is called *Pranava*—meaning that it pervades life and runs through our prana or breath. *Udgitha*, a word found in Sama Veda is also used as a name of the syllable. Other used terms are *Akshara* (literally, letter of the alphabet, imperishable, immutable) or *Ekākṣara* (one letter of the alphabet). There is harmony, peace, and bliss in this simple but deeply philosophical sound. It projects the mind beyond the immediate to a metaphysical state that is abstract and inexpressible. The syllable is described in detail in many Upanishads, in particular Chandogya, Katha, Mandukya, Mundaka, Shvetashvatara, Maitri, and Aitareya Upanishads. **The Katha Upanishad** states, “The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whosoever knows this support is adored in the world of Brahman”. **The Mandukya Upanishad** further elaborates, “Om is the one eternal syllable of which all that exists. The

past, the present, and the future are all included in this one sound, and all that exists beyond the three forms of time is also implied in it.”

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