

# aum

by Rainey

The creation myths of almost all cultures offer sound as the medium by which Spirit gives birth to the physical world. That makes me wonder about the many possibilities we may invoke by the power of our own voices steeped in deep intention. I think of the power of words to heal or to wound and the soothing or jarring effects of certain music. The simple act of giving sound to our breath is giving form to the formless. When I sit in a yoga class surrounded by the resonance of people chanting Om I feel held and supported by the sound and the creators of that sound. It causes me to sink deeper into myself. Why is that?

Sound is all around us in the grind of cars, the chirping of the birds, the whirring of my computer as well as the sound of voices. Sound at its essence is vibration that stimulates our sense of hearing. Some sounds agitate us while others sooth us. We not only take in sound through our ears but also through our tissue and bone like when we feel the thump-thump of the stereo bass in the car behind us through our own driver's seat and into our very bodies. Quantum physics has shown us that not only is sound vibration but everything is vibrating, rocks, furniture, plants, people...everything. As the Greek philosopher, Pythagoras, said "A stone is frozen music, frozen sound." We all just vibrate or sing at different frequencies. Sometimes bodies with different frequencies can resonate with each other. This phenomenon is called entrainment and is seen in the experiment of hanging pendulum clocks next to each other and over time they start to swing together in the same rhythm, synchronized.

When we sing the sound Om together it is a way of acknowledging and joining our singular voices to the choir of life and celebrating each of our places in it. When we join our voices we begin to resonate with each other. We breathe deeply together, focus our intention in the same direction and we find a similar rhythm. When I am a part of that effort the sound and intention actually enter me and I feel buoyed up. Have you ever noticed that when we chant Om at the beginning and again at the end of class that the closing Om is often more harmonious and easy than the opening Om? After spending over an hour with each other in deep practice we have entrained with each other and the result is effortless harmony. This is entrainment at its sweetest.

The key to this resonance with music or other people is listening. When we "listen" to sounds or music we actively invite the vibrations to enter us through all our faculties and truly affect us as opposed to simply "hearing" sounds and music and letting them be part of the background noise of our life. Sitting together in yoga class chanting Om allows us the opportunity to begin to resonate with like minded beings and verbalize our intention to practice life together in harmony and support. As we chant we listen to the voices around us and then join ours to the symphony.

So what is OM anyway? The sound Om comes from the ancient language of Sanskrit and is a non-religious representation of all vibration, of the entire Universe in its many layers of pulsation and meaning. Although we often see it written as OM this primordial sound in fact has four parts to it...A U M. A stands for creation, birth, beginning, U represents preservation, maintenance, life, and M stands for destruction, dissolution, death; the cycle of life. A (pronounced Ah) is the first sound of the Sanskrit alphabet. This sound is produced in the throat and is the easiest and often the first sound we make...Ahhhhh! It resonates with the lower abdomen. U (pronounced Ooh) is formed in the middle of the mouth finding its resonance in the dome of the mouth. It draws the Ah at the back of the throat forward to the cavity of the mouth and is expansive. It vibrates in the solar plexus and the heart. M (pronounced Mmm) is the final consonant in the Sanskrit alphabet and is the one of most refined sounds we as humans can make, pursing the lips together and vibrating the whole bone structure of the head. As the sound travels from the back of the throat all the way to the lips it symbolizes all the possibility of language and music. The fourth aspect of OM is the silence out of which it arises and back to which it returns. All together this amazing sound depicts the Absolute, the breath and pulsation of the Universe, all the infinite possibilities and cycles of life.

The practice of chanting OM with my fellow yogis helps me to connect with them and myself. I listen to our melodic voices, plant the seed of intention for my practice with the support of our song and know that we all resonate with more brilliance because of our shared longing to have our hearts and bodies sing with clarity and joy. It is an honor to be so touched and supported by my community. OM.