

By concentrating on the sound and vibration of the om, you are symbolically concentrating on the part of you that is beyond your ego, mind, and mind-stuff.*

By Garth Hewitt



SURRENDER + CONNECTION + JOY

WHY WE OM

In traditional yoga, the om is the symbol and sound of Isvara, the name given to pure consciousness or pure awareness. The big shift of perspective we are after in traditional yoga is to have our awareness resting in itself, not caught up in the ego, mind, and mind-stuff. By concentrating on the sound and vibration of the om, you are symbolically concentrating on the part of you that is beyond your ego, mind, and mind-stuff.

From the Upanishads, we also have the description of the sound of the om, or aum, as representing the potential for all sounds. Within that expansive vibrational hum is everything—and by focusing on everything, you are also focusing on nothing. The om is often described as having a beginning, middle, and end and is representational of these forces in the universe. That's why we sometimes think of om as aum. The A, U, and M represent the three forces of expansion, preservation, and dissolution, a process that plays out in our lives over and over again. Everything has a beginning, middle, and end.

I like to think of the om in a group class as a moment to connect in a tangible way with something beyond myself. It's a moment when I literally surrender to the group. It's a moment when we are all concentrating on the same thing. It's a moment when we all inhale together and take a long exhale together as we reach out and touch each other with vibration. It's a symbolic way for us to say that this time isn't about me and my ego but about rising above, surrendering to the whole group, finding connection and union.

One of the nicknames for om is pranava. Dr. Lorin Roche, a wonderful yogic scholar and meditation teacher, defines "pranava" as "the roar of joy." I think about this definition sometimes when I om. I think about the life-force moving through me as this roar of joy.

The next time you om in your yoga class, take a moment and contemplate the meaning of the om. This is a moment to honor everyone and everything. Focus on everything and nothing at the same time. Take a deep breath and feel the connection to your

breath. When you sound the om, feel the vibration coming up from within you and feel the vibration all around you. Feel the connection to the others in the room with you. Take the focus off of your ego, mind, mind-stuff—the individual desires and distractions that are keeping you from being in the present moment. You might take a moment to think, "I am a microcosmic vibration, the roar of joy. I am a small part of the larger cosmic vibration, the roar of joy. I have a beginning, middle, and end. I am in the universe. The universe is in me. I am the universe. The universe is me."

Oooooommmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!

Garth Hewitt, E-RYT 500, is a teacher trainer, yoga therapist, certified YogaWorks teacher, and certified Dharma Yoga teacher. He has led classes, workshops, retreats, and teacher trainings in Los Angeles and around the world. Garth has been featured in *Men's Health*, *Mantra Yoga + Health*, and *LA Yoga*.