

Sounding the Depths On Japa Yoga

Arjun von Caemmerer (2024)

The Soule is harmonical, and hath its neerest sympathy unto Musicke

Sir Thomas Browne *Religio Medici* (1642)

Introduction

My exposure to *Praṇava-Japa*, the repetition of *ĀUM*, at the Ramāmaṇi Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute (and at other Iyengar Yoga schools) has been limited to the 3-fold recitation of *ĀUM* that prefaces ‘The Invocation to Patañjali’ at the commencement (and sometimes also the conclusion) of classes. In this article I wish to consider Japa Yoga in more depth, particularly in its relationship to the practice of *prāṇāyāma*. It is noteworthy that in Patañjali’s *Yoga-Sūtra* there occur almost as many sūtras on *Praṇava-Japa* as there on *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* counted together. The sūtras concerning *Īśvara-Japa* appear in Chapter 1, Samādhi Pāda:

1.23 *Īśvara* praṇidhānāt vā

Total surrender to *Īśvara* also enables *Yoga*.

1.24 kleśa karma vipāka āśayaiḥ aparāmṛṣṭrah puruṣaviśeṣaḥ *Īśvaraḥ*

Īśvara is the distinctive awareness of the innermost Self: unafflicted and incorruptible; clear of latent impression; not subject to cause and effect.

1.25 tatra niratiśayam sarvajñabījam

In *Īśvara* lies the seed of all knowing.

1.26 sa eṣaḥ purveṣam api guruḥ kālena anavacchedāt

Unconditioned by time, *Īśvara* endures: the true and constant *Guru* for *Yogins* past, present and future.

1.27 tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ

Īśvara reverberates as the sound *ĀUM*.

1.28 tajjapaḥ tadarthabhāvanam

Its essence is realized through repetition and saturation.

1.29 tataḥ pratyakcetana adhigamaḥ api antarāya abhāvaḥ ca

Then, consciousness draws inwards, and the obstacles to practice recede.

In **Light on the Yoga-Sūtras of Patañjali** (1993) BKS Iyengar points out a fundamental difference between the first and second chapters of the *Yoga-Sūtra*: Samādhi Pāda, whilst mapping the overall terrain of Yoga, is particularly directed towards those *already stable* in practice; by contrast however, the second chapter, Sādhana Pāda, is especially suitable for neophytes. There is thus a correspondence between these two chapters and the hierarchy of the practices of *prāṇāyāma* and *āsana*, as *prāṇāyāma* practice is only considered appropriate for those already established in *āsana* practice (see Sūtra 2.49)¹.

¹ 2.49: *Prāṇāyāma*, the practice of the regulation of the breath (inhalation, exhalation, and suspension), follows only from a sound foundation in *Āsana*.

Considered in this light, it is not surprising then that a type of prāṇāyāma is explicitly mentioned in the first chapter (Sūtra 1.34 explicates a basic prāṇāyāma technique²), whereas direct reference to āsana is absent. Furthermore, if Japa is also considered as a form of prāṇāyāma, and if Samādhi Pāda is regarded as a stand-alone text, it is interesting to see that the centre (or heart) of this abbreviated yoga treatise reverberates in the ‘silent space’ falling between the 27th and 28th of its 55 sūtras, that is, in the midst of the two sūtras that explicitly articulate the prāṇāyāmic practice of Japa.

On *ĀUM*

ĀUM {in Devanagari script, ॐ} is canvassed in BKS Iyengar’s Introduction to **Light on Yoga** (1966). The synonym used for *ĀUM* in the *Yoga-Sūtra, praṇava*, derives from *pra*, foremost, and *nu*, to praise, so means the first (or highest) praise (or prayer).

Sri BKS Iyengar writes:

Without *ekāgratā* or concentration one can master nothing. Without concentration on Divinity, which shapes and controls the universe, one cannot unlock the divinity within oneself. To achieve this concentration, what is recommended is *eka-tattva-abhyāsa* or study of the single element that pervades all, the inmost Self of all beings, who converts His one form into many. The *sādhaka*, therefore, concentrates upon *AUM*, which is his symbol, to achieve *ekāgratā*.

Iyengar then enumerates some of the manifold meanings that *ĀUM* has accreted, from the 3-fold homology of *Ā+U+M* (derived principally from the Maitri Upaniṣad) to the inclusion of a 4th global-transcendent aspect (derived from the Māndūkya Upaniṣad).

He includes:

The Waking, Dreaming and Dreamless states (& Samādhi);

Speech, Mind and Breath (& Spirit);

Length, Breadth and Depth (& Divinity, beyond shape and form);

Absence of Desire, Fear and Anger (& the presence of Wisdom);

Masculine, Feminine and Neuter (& Creator-Creation);

Sattva, Rajas and Tamas (& Guṇatīta, beyond these qualities);

Past, Present and Future (& the Timeless);

Teaching, derived from Mother, Father and Guru (& Brahma Vidyā, Self-Knowledge);

Āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Pratyāhāra (& Samādhi);

Brahmā/Creator, Viṣṇu/Maintainer and Śiva/Destroyer (& Brahman, the Ever-Unchanged).

To these may be added another three (and, for yoga practitioners, central) triune processes referred to in the *Yoga-Sūtra*. These (like Sri BKS Iyengar’s own insertion of āsana, prāṇāyāma and pratyāhāra into the above list) can be seen—and utilised—in a broader context than just that of Hinduism, and include:

² 1.34: [Consciousness is] also soothed by the measured exhalation and retention of breath.

Tapas, Svādhyāya and Īśvara-praṇidhānāni (Kriyā-Yoga, as defined in Sūtra 2.1)³;
Karma Yoga, Jñāna Yoga and Bhakti Yoga (a re-formulation of Kriyā-Yoga)⁴;
Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna and Samādhi (Samyama, as defined in Sūtra 3.4)⁵.

Clearly, this recurrent tripartite division is itself condensed, encoded, and reflected within the 3-fold recitation of *ĀUM* that precedes ‘The Invocation to Patañjali’. An inclusive-transcendent 4th component may here be considered as the enduring background silence that perpetually pervades—and which even makes possible—the aural component.

Mantra

In the Introduction to **Light on Yoga**, BKS Iyengar writes on mantra:

The word ‘mantra’ is derived from the root ‘man’, to think. Mantra thus means a sacred thought or prayer to be repeated with full understanding of its meaning. It takes a long time, perhaps years, for a mantra to take firm root in the mind of a feeble sādḥaka and still longer for it to bear fruit.

What is meant by a ‘feeble sādḥaka’ is conveyed in no uncertain terms by Iyengar’s quotation from the **Śiva Samhitā**:

The feeble (*mṛdu*) seekers are those who lack enthusiasm, criticise their teachers, are rapacious, inclined to bad action, eat too much, are in the power of women, unstable, cowardly, ill, dependent, speak harshly, have weak characters and lack virility. The Guru (Teacher or Master) guides such seekers in the path of Mantra Yoga only.

This ‘bad rap’ on feeble practitioners (and collaterally on mantra generally) seems, to some degree, to be a legacy of the hatha yoga tradition, as James Mallinson and Mark Singleton point out in **Roots of Yoga** (2017) who note the significant absence of mantra in early works on hatha yoga (including the *Hathapradīpikā*), and quote the *Dattātreya yogaśāstra* that installs mantra at the bottom of its yoga practice hierarchy: *it is for ‘the lowest aspirant, he of little wisdom’ and ‘can be mastered by all and sundry’.*

However, in his later book **Light on Prāṇāyāma** (1981), Sri BKS Iyengar devotes the whole of chapter 17, *Bīja Prāṇāyāma*, to the subject of mantra as well as including a fuller excursus on *ĀUM*. His tenor here is more positive and inclusive:

Mantra is a vedic hymn or musical verse, the repetition of which is japa or a prayer. The purpose of mantra japa is to check and focus the disturbed mind upon a single point and is linked to a single thought. This has to be done with sincerity, love and devotion... Japa is used to disengage the mind from idle talk, jealous ideas and tale-bearing...It is the focusing of a wandering, agitated mind upon a single thought, act or feeling.

Mantras are given for repeated continuous utterance, with reason, purpose and object. Constant repetition (japa) of a mantra with reflection upon its meaning (artha-bhāvana: artha= meaning, bhāvana = reflection) brings illumination. By such constant repetition and reflection, the

³ 2.1: *Yoga* method integrates Application, Investigation and Surrender.

⁴ The paths of Action, Knowledge and Devotion.

⁵ 3.4: Unison of *Dhāraṇā* (Concentration), *Dhyāna* (Meditation) and *Samādhi* (Absorption) is *Samyama*.

thoughts of the sādḥaka are churned, cleansed, and clarified. This japa transforms the sādḥaka and transmutes his ego, thereby making him humble. He attains inner quietness and becomes one who has conquered his senses (jitēndriyan).

The practice of prāṇāyāma is of two kinds: sabīja (with seed) and nirbīja (without seed). Sabīja prāṇāyāma includes the repetition of a mantra and is taught to four types of sādḥakas, with varying degrees of mental development, mūḍha (dull/stupid/ignorant), kṣipta (distracted/absent), vikṣipta (agitated/scattered), and ekāgra (focussed/one-pointed). Nirbīja is taught to the one with the highest mental development, niruddha (restrained).

Sabīja prāṇāyāma turns the mind and intellect of the sādḥaka to the Lord, the seed of omniscience and the source of all being. The word that expresses him is the mystic syllable *ĀUM* (praṇava). The Lord has been described by Patañjali as one who is untouched by the cycles of action and reaction, cause and effect, affliction and pleasure.

Prāṇāyāma & Breath-Tone: Ajapā Gāyatrī

Gāyatrī is derived from *gāya*, 'through singing' and *trī*, 'that which gives deliverance'; Ajapā means 'unuttered'. In the Introduction to **Light on Yoga**, on the section on prāṇāyāma (and again in the glossary) Sri BKS Iyengar writes:

Ajapa-mantra: Unconscious repetitive prayer. Every living creature unconsciously breathes the prayer 'So'ham' (Sah = He {the Universal Spirit}, aham = am I) with each inward breath, and with each outgoing breath prays 'Hamsaḥ' (Aham = I am, Saḥ = He {the Universal Spirit}). This unconscious repetitive prayer goes on for ever within each living creature throughout life. The yogi fully realises the significance of this ajapa-mantra and so is released from the fetters that bind his soul. He offers up the very breath of his being to the Lord as a sacrifice and receives the breath of life from the Lord as his blessing.

Roots of Yoga (p.263) has a similar, albeit compressed, formulation of the Ajapā Gāyatrī: Although tantric mantra-repetition is rarely a feature of *haṭha-yoga*, a yogic conception of mantra found in the early tantric corpus is taught in some *haṭha* texts. This is the *Haṃsa* mantra, which is called the Ajapā ('unrecited') Gāyatrī in the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*. *Haṃsa* is constantly and involuntarily repeated – *ha* is uttered on the out-breath and *sa* on the in-breath – and when its components are reversed it becomes the Upaniṣadic dictum *so'ham* ('I am that').

This condensed version of the Ajapā Gāyatrī very closely parallels the aural-tonal quality of inhalation and exhalation as described by Iyengar during the practice of prāṇāyāma:

From Light on Yoga, Prāṇāyāma Hints and Cautions

The rhythm [of prāṇāyāma practice] should be gauged from the nasal sound produced in inhalation ('sssssa' which sounds like a leak in a bicycle tube) and exhalation (the aspirate 'huuuuuuuuum' sound).

Since the eyes are kept closed throughout the practice of prāṇāyāma, the passage of time is noted by the mental repetition (japa) of a sacred word or name.

From Light on Yoga, Technique and Effects of Prāṇāyāma Ujjāyī prāṇāyāma

The passage of the incoming air is felt on the roof of the palate and makes a sibilant sound (sa). This sound should be heard.

While exhaling the passage of the outgoing air should be felt on the roof of the palate. The brushing on the air of the palate should make an aspirate sound (ha).

Iyengar’s instructions on breath-tone in prāṇāyāma clearly have an almost one-to-one correlation with the Ajapā Gāyatrī: his ‘sa/sssssa’ with the ‘so’ of inhalation; his ‘ha’/huuuuuuuuum’ and ‘ with the ‘ham’ of exhalation. He also clearly implies that (apart from the quality of the breath) the ‘passage of time’, that is, the breath-duration, can be measured by the length of the breath-sounds.

Bhrāmarī Prāṇāyāma

*In the name of the Bee —
And of the Butterfly —
And of the Breeze — Amen!*

Emily Dickinson (1838)

The word ‘hum’ is patently onomatopoeic: it sounds as it spells. [Even the transliterated word ‘Bhrāmarī holds an echo of this]. ‘Hum’ is clearly also a variant of the ‘ham’ exhalation sound above. The humming of Bhrāmarī prāṇāyāma (hereby dubbed as ‘hymnal’ japa) can be considered as occupying an aural middle territory, between that of the purely tonal Ajapā Gāyatrī and the practice of orally articulated *ĀUM*-Japa.

From BKS Iyengar’s **Light on Prāṇāyāma**:

Bhrāmara means a large black bumble-bee and this prāṇāyāma is so called because during exhalation a soft humming sound like that of a bumble-bee is made. Deep inhalations are done as in Ujjāyī prāṇāyāma and deep exhalations with a humming or murmuring sound. It may be done while performing ṣaṇmukhī mudra⁶ without jālandhara bandha. The best time to perform it is in the silence and quiet of the night. The humming sound induces sleep and is good for insomnia.

Ṣaṇmukhi Mudra involves positioning the digits on the face in a shape like that of opened butterfly wings. As the sensitive skin of the palmar aspect and the tips of the digits are used in close apposition to the sense organs—the thumb-tips occlude the ear canal, the index & middle fingers cover the eyes, the ring fingers are on the nose, and the little fingers on the face adjacent to the mouth—the effect of any disturbance (for example within the eyes or mouth cavity, or any hardening of the skin of the face) is, in a literal form of digital feedback, amplified and rendered directly palpable. Occlusion of the ears minimises the perception of external sounds, whilst also simultaneously magnifying the breath-tone, both felt and heard. As the tips of the ring fingers are sited on the bone-cartilage junction of the nose, they can be used to regulate the calibre of the nasal passages to facilitate slow, steady and rhythmic breathing, which means that Bhrāmarī with ṣaṇmukhi mudra can be considered a form of digital prāṇāyāma, as well as a type of ‘exhalation-dominant’ prāṇāyāma.

⁶ *mudra* = seal; also, a gesture, often having both symbolic and practical significance

ĀUM-Japa

In **The Heart of Yoga**, T.K.V. Desikachar (who, like BKS Iyengar, was also a student of Sri Krishnamacharya) writes:

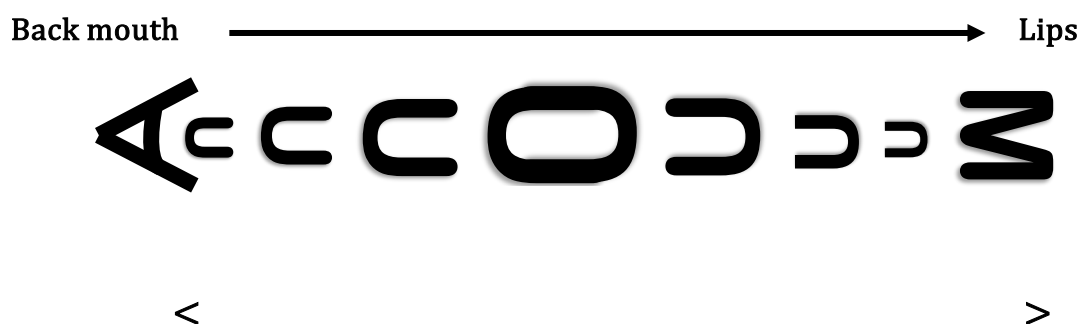
If we analyze *OM* as it is written in Sanskrit, we see it is made up of *A*, *U*, and *M*, and a symbol representing resonance. So, *OM* has four aspects. The first is *A*, a sound that comes from the belly, is formed in the open throat, and is voiced with the mouth open. As with many alphabets, *A* is the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet. The second sound is the *U*, a sound that is formed in the middle of the mouth. The mouth is not as wide open as it is for the sounding of the *A*. With the third sound, *M*, the mouth closes. The sound rises to the nasal passages, from where the resonance, the fourth aspect of *OM* issues forth.

U stands for continuity and connection, and *M* is the final consonant in the Sanskrit alphabet. So, getting from *A* to *M* through *U* represents everything that can be expressed in words and letters. And everything that can be expressed in words is Īsvara. When I sound *A*, I must open my mouth, which stands for the process of creation. *U* symbolizes the continuance of creation, which is constantly renewing itself. *M* symbolizes the end and dissolution. Following *M* the sound carries on for a while. This sound has no alphabetical symbol to represent it. We say therefore that Īsvara is not only that which can be expressed in words, but also that which cannot be expressed in words. This is the full meaning of *OM*.

And, according to Ainhoa Acosta⁷:

At a physical level, the Aum syllable addresses the whole of the human sound instrument: we open the mouth ('a'), move the lips closer to each other ('u') and then close the mouth ('m'). This activates the larynx fully. 'A' resonates in the stomach and chest, 'u' in the throat and chest, and 'm' in the nasal cavity, skull and brain.

An observation: 'AUM' is literally shaped in in the process of its own articulation: with 'A' the back of the mouth bifurcates as it opens, issues a 'U' in conical transition to an O, which reshapes a 'reverse U' as the sound tapers, ending with the M-shaped (as seen from the side) apposition of the lips. The volume of articulated sound, as expressed in musical symbols, follows a similar contour, < >, the crescendo-decrescendo pattern:



⁷ <https://iyengaryogalondon.co.uk/the-science-and-philosophy-of-om-aum/>

The *Yoga-Sūtra* and the Breath-Cycle

Sūtra 2.49 defines prāṇāyāma and refers to Śvāsa, Praśvāsa and Gativiccheda, that is respectively to the inhalation, exhalation, and to the periods of suspension in between these movements. This means that any breath-cycle can be considered to have 4 parts: inhalation, post-inhalation interval, exhalation, and post-exhalation interval.

Considered mathematically, each breath-cycle oscillates between 'zero', the nadir of the post-exhalation interval, and 'one', the zenith of the post-inhalation interval. The dynamic shape of this process can also be perceived - the inhalation experienced as a point, expanding to a sphere; and the exhalation as a sphere, contracting to a point:

0 •))))))1(((((((• 0 •))))))1(((((((• 0 •))))))1(((((((• 0

As sound waves occur as S-shaped sine waves (~), the combination of S with the concentric expansion that forms a sphere gives inhalation literally and morphologically an S-O shape; threading the same sine wave through the diminishing concentric circles of exhalation forms a H-like shape (~(culminating in a (sideways rotated) M-shape: ☉

So Hm sounds again!

I propose that a useful and functional correlation can be drawn between each breath-cycle and with the 4 pādas (or chapters) of the *Yoga-Sūtra* itself. The following relationships accord naturally:

Samādhi Pāda with **Inhalation** (this chapter provides the map, the inspiration for yoga);

Sādhana Pāda with the **Post-Inhalation Interval** (*tapas*, in Sūtra 2.1, 'holds' intention);

Vibhūti Pāda with **Exhalation** (Sūtra 3.38 suggests relinquishing accomplishment⁸); and

Kaivalya Pāda with the **Post-Exhalation Interval** (in **Light on The Yoga-Sūtras of Patañjali**, p.331, kaivalya is defined as 'absolute aloneness' — in this context, the 'alone'-ness or 'zeroing' that occurs at the end of each breath-cycle).

Mudras

In addition to Śaṅmukhi Mudra, other mudras can be useful for the practice of Japa:

Namaskar Mudra: palms joined with the heels of the hands on the lower sternum;

Jānu-Hasta Graha Mudra: fingertips holding the knees;

Urvi-Hasta Mudra⁹: hands resting, palm side-down, onto the thighs;

Caṣaka Mudra: hands cupped resting onto the lap (Caṣaka = cup; spiritous liquor).

These mudras help amplify the actions and sensations of the various breath stages: Namaskar with the process of inhalation; Jānu-Hasta Graha with maintaining the post-inhalation interval; Śaṅmukhi and Urvi-Hasta with the process of exhalation; and Caṣaka,

⁸ 3.38: The attainment of extraordinary powers may distract from *Samādhi*. (Sūtra 3.52 is very similar.)

⁹ *Urvi*: one of the 'marmasthānas', a vital body point, just above the mid-thigh – from **Health Through Yoga** by Mira Mehta (Thorsons, 2002)

facilitating settling into the post-exhalation interval. They also help with counting (see below).

Praṇava Pariṇāma: The Music of the Spheres

My mind boomed with the sound of Om...

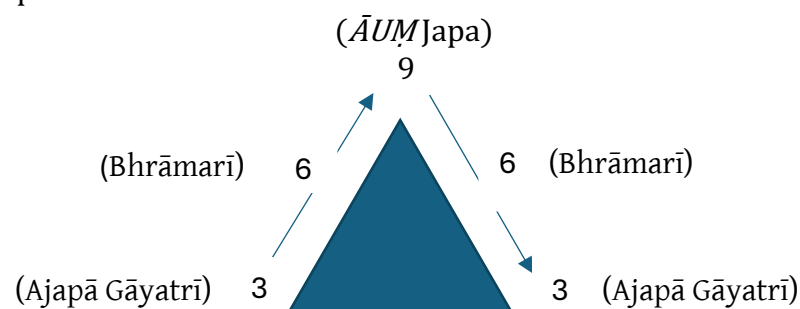
Lal Dēd

Here I outline my own practice of Japa, '*Praṇava Pariṇāma*'¹⁰, a component of my current prāṇāyāma practice. This is not intended prescriptively, but rather as an illustrative example of how a practice of Japa (itself a variant of prāṇāyāma) might be incorporated into an already existing prāṇāyāma practice. As outlined, the whole practice takes me around 40 minutes. I practice this approximately weekly. I prefer Swastikāsana (simple cross-leg) for sitting and change the cross of the legs midway through the period. I alternate the starting cross-leg from one practice to the next.

This sequence includes 108 cycles¹¹ and includes tonal japa (Ajapā Gāyatrī), hymnal japa (Bhrāmārī), and oral japa (*ĀUM*-recitation). I have divided these 108 cycles into 4 pādas, where each pāda (of 27 cycles) emphasises one of the four phases of the breath. They are similar in format to one another. Each pāda includes:

3 cycles of Ajapā; 6 of Bhrāmārī; 9 of *ĀUM*-Japa; another 6 Bhrāmārī; and, a final 3 Ajapā.

Each pāda can be depicted thus:



With practice, the first half of each pāda can crescendo to the apical 5th *ĀUM*-Japa; from the 6th *ĀUM*-Japa the pāda can decrescendo to the final Ajapā.

Pāda 1 (correlates with Samādhi Pāda): Emphasis on Inhalation. The hands held in Namaskar Mudra help to connect with the lift in the mid-chest and sternum that occurs with active inhalation.

Pāda 2 (correlates with Sādhana Pāda): Emphasis on the Post-Inhalation Interval. The hands in Jānu-Hasta Graha Mudra help to maintain the lift from the back body to the front. This is not a full or formal internal retention of breath (antara-kumbhaka) as such, but rather a heightened awareness of the naturally occurring pause between inhalation and exhalation — therefore the simultaneous practice of Jālandhara Bandha is not required.

¹⁰ *Pariṇāma*: change, alteration, transformation.

¹¹ Why 108? A power-full number (1¹, 2², 3³), sacred in the Dharmic religions (Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism), whose prayer bead malas often number 108.

Pāda 3 (correlates with Vibhūti Pāda): Emphasis on Exhalation. The hands rest in Urvi-Hasta Mudra (except when practising Bhrāmarī when Śaṅmukhi Mudra is adopted).

Pāda 4 (correlates with Kaivalya Pāda): Emphasis on the Post-Exhalation Interval. The hands rest further, palm-side up and open on the lap, receptive, in Caṣaka Mudra.

The overall practice outlines a crescendo-decrescendo arc, mirroring the contour of each pāda and of every breath. The practice, in common with other prāṇāyāma practices, concludes with time spent in Śavāsana.

Private or Group Practice? - Ear-Group Pressure

Teaching prāṇāyāma to a group holds challenges: as every individual has their own breath-duration (and this can vary even within a practice for any practitioner) it can be frustrating for a student, psychologically and physiologically, to have a teacher instruct actions on the breath that are uncoordinated with their own. This mismatch can be amplified in group Japa, where the loudest voices can not only swamp the others' but can also impose inappropriate durations or inflections. Further, a practitioner's self-consciousness may easily be magnified in this context: they might feel that they sound 'inauthentic' etc. My own view is that this type of practice is more suited to the individual than for a group: not only can one then unselfconsciously seek the optimal voicing, volume and timing for articulation etc¹², but this also accords with the relatively internalised nature of this facet of yoga practice.

Counting

Day and night, count the rosary of your breath, and stay put wherever you are.

Lal Dēd

It is easy to lose count of the cycles. Furthermore, the process of counting can itself be distracting as it can weight 'the centre of gravity' of the practice toward the brain and head. The mudras suggested above are practically useful here: they automatically amplify sensations in certain parts of the body as the breath moves, helping to conduct the count by feeling. I have depicted a counting methodology in tabular form that shows where sensations can be felt in natural synchrony with the breath movements. The following abbreviations are used:

T = Tonal (Ajapā Gāyatrī); **H** = Hymnal (Bhrāmarī); **O** = Oral (ĀUM-recitation)

Though this method might appear complicated, it is not in practice. With the hands in Namaskar mudra, the practice begins with Ajapā Gāyatrī (here designated as **T1-T3**), continues with Bhrāmarī (**H1-6**), then ĀUM-recitation (**O1-9**). Note that **O5** is the apex of the pāda cycle, following which the direction reverses, mirroring the first half in location and count, here designated with **r**. The practitioner can then move, adopting the appropriate mudras, successively through the other pādas.

¹² All of the variables governing prāṇāyāma listed by Patañjali in Sūtra 2:50 — locus (deśa), duration (kāla), number (saṅkyābhiḥ), range (dīrgha), subtlety/depth (sūkṣmaḥ) — are applicable to the practice of Japa.

Japa Counting Table

<i>Pāda 1</i>	<i>Pāda 2</i>	<i>Pāda 3</i>	<i>Pāda 4</i>
<i>Namaskar Mudra</i>	<i>Jānu-Hasta Graha Mudra</i>	<i>Urvi-Hasta Mudra</i>	<i>Caṣaka Mudra</i>
↓ <i>T1/rT3</i> sternum	↓ <i>T1/rT3</i> shoulder blades	↓ <i>T1/rT3</i> shoulder blades	↓ <i>T1/rT3</i> navel
<i>T2/rT2</i> mid-palms	<i>T2/rT2</i> elbow region	<i>T2/rT2</i> back of upper arm	<i>T2/rT2</i> hands
<i>T3/rT1</i> knuckles (palm-side)	<i>T3/rT1</i> hand/knee junction	<i>T3/rT1</i> palm/thigh junction	<i>T3/rT1</i> thighs
<i>H1/rH6</i> laryngo-pharynx	<i>H1/rH6</i> laryngo-pharynx	<i>H1/rH6 (Ṣaṇmukhi)</i> palms	<i>H1/rH6</i> laryngo-pharynx
<i>H2/rH5</i> back mouth	<i>H2/rH5</i> back mouth	<i>H2/rH5 (Ṣaṇmukhi)</i> little fingers	<i>H2/rH5</i> back mouth
<i>H3/rH4</i> root of tongue	<i>H3/rH4</i> root of tongue	<i>H3/rH4 (Ṣaṇmukhi)</i> ring fingers	<i>H3/rH4</i> root of tongue
<i>H4/rH3</i> mouth floor	<i>H4/rH3</i> mouth floor	<i>H4/rH3 (Ṣaṇmukhi)</i> middle fingers	<i>H4/rH3</i> mouth floor
<i>H5/rH2</i> mouth roof	<i>H5/rH2</i> mouth roof	<i>H5/rH2 (Ṣaṇmukhi)</i> index fingers	<i>H5/rH2</i> mouth roof
<i>H6/rH1</i> front mouth	<i>H6/rH1</i> front mouth	<i>H6/rH1 (Ṣaṇmukhi)</i> thumbs	<i>H6/rH1</i> front mouth
<i>O1/rO9</i> chest/hand junction	<i>O1/rO9</i> navel region	<i>O1/rO9</i> navel region	<i>O1/rO9</i> navel region
<i>O2/rO8</i> hand/chest junction	<i>O2/rO8</i> diaphragm	<i>O2/rO8</i> diaphragm	<i>O2/rO8</i> diaphragm
<i>O3/rO7</i> mid-palms	<i>O3/rO7</i> sternum	<i>O3/rO7</i> sternum	<i>O3/rO7</i> sternum
<i>O4/rO6</i> knuckles	<i>O4/rO6</i> throat	<i>O4/rO6</i> throat	<i>O4/rO6</i> throat
<i>O5</i> ↑ digits	<i>O5</i> ↑ mouth	<i>O5</i> ↑ mouth	<i>O5</i> ↑ mouth

Notes:

- 1) Initially inhale to establish connection e.g. In Pāda 1, *T1* to sternum
- 2) Exhale with attention in the area nominated
- 3) Maintain attention here during subsequent inhalation
- 4) In the post-inhalation interval shift attention to the next area
- 5) Exhale with attention in this area etc.

nb Change cross-leg before Pāda 3

In the Beginning was The Word...

As noted above, some of the meanings attributed to *ĀUM*, align with Hinduism. But Sri BKS Iyengar was very clear in his view of yoga as potentially accessible to anyone and everyone, regardless of their religion. In **The Tree of Yoga** (Ch.4, *East and West*) he writes:

Nowhere in the ancient texts is it said that yoga is only to be practised by the Hindus. On the contrary, Patanjali describes yoga as a 'sarvabhauma'. 'Bhauma' means the world; 'sarva' means all. Yoga is a universal culture.

He dubbed yoga as 'the science of religion' rather than as a religion per se, and, in my view, its unparalleled utility is that it is pragmatically useful, whether the practitioner identifies as religious, agnostic or atheist. How then might an agnostic or atheist regard *ĀUM*-Japa, that is, establish whether such a practice holds any meaningful resonance? Iyengar advocates an empirical approach by which a practitioner can, through the medium of their own practice, verify or refute—or even add to—received knowledge. In the same book (Ch.21, *The Fruit*) he writes:

Put the words to the test of your experience. Do not be carried away by my words or anyone else's words. Rub yourself with each word through work and practice. Rubbing means to experience. Go with it! Find out! I request you to rub yourself with my words and with other people's words, and until they are digested, do not form opinions. Experience is real; words are not real. They are somebody else's words, but it is your own experience. So put everything to the test of experience.

And The Word was... *The Big Note*

In 1968 Stuart Scott interviewed composer Frank Zappa:

Scott: *In all of the social change going on, does God fit in anywhere?*

Zappa: *Sure, well, he runs it, doesn't he?*

Scott: *Does He run your life?*

Zappa: *Yes, absolutely. But, His packaging might be a little bizarre for you to understand. My God is different from your God.*

Scott: *Who is your God?*

Zappa: *I haven't named Him. I don't think it's necessary. A lot of people have to rely on images: "There He is with the long white beard, white hair, and flowing white robe – GOD!" I don't see it that way. It's closely related to music. I don't perceive God on an emotional level.*

Scott: *How then? On a more structured level?*

Zappa: *Order comes into it. Like on the next album, "Lumpy Gravy", there is some dialogue integrated into the music where two characters are discussing The Big Note. That's the closest that I can come to describing to you what I think of God. He's like a Big Note. Everything, it would appear, is constructed from vibrations. Light is a vibration, sound is a vibration and it's quite possible that, when you break them down, the atoms themselves are nothing more than vibrations of this Big Note. And, in dealing with vibrations, one might be able to become closer in tune to some sort of Universal Force – if you want to get down to that corny, cheesy level. But, that's the way I see it.*

for kHz ~ & OM

The Big Note



The Last Word —

*A thousand times at least I asked my Guru
to give Nothingness a name.
Then I gave up. What name can you give
to the source from which all names have sprung?*

Lal Dėd

The best of all music is silence.

BKS Iyengar

*When the scriptures melt away, the chants remain.
When the chants melt away, the mind remains.
When the mind melts away, what's left?
A void mingles with the Void.*

Lal Dėd

References and Reverences

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Arjun von Caemmerer is certificated as a Level 3 Iyengar Yoga teacher with Iyengar Yoga Australia (IYA) and is a medical practitioner, specialized in general practice (FRACGP), consulting in Moonah, Tasmania. He has, with Naomi Cameron, run the Hobart School of Iyengar Yoga, since 1995. He has had roles with IYA as a teacher trainer, assessor and moderator, and has served on the Teachers' and Ethics Committees.

Other Iyengar Yoga articles by Arjun von Caemmerer

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