

CHAPTER 2: THE VEDIC ALPHABET

I. THE SOURCE OF THE VEDIC ALPHABET

The starting point for the study of the Sanskrit alphabet is the direct experience of what in Sanskrit is called *Ātmā*. In modern times it is described as Transcendental Consciousness, the fourth state of consciousness;¹ it is experienced as the source of thought, unbounded wakefulness, bliss consciousness, the experiencer awake in himself without any object of perception.² The development of experience of Transcendental Consciousness has been systematized in a practical format of instruction, called the Transcendental Meditation[®] technique. Through the practice of the Transcendental Meditation program, individuals report the experience of “restful alertness,” where the mind is peaceful, restful, but alert, awake inside, while the body is gaining very deep rest.³ Forty years of scientific research on the practice has validated the uniqueness of this state, distinguishing it from ordinary waking state experiences and has shown the growth of higher states of consciousness, states of consciousness utilizing more and more “hidden reserves,” the innate potential of the human nervous system.⁴

When the myriad thoughts and engagements of the active mind settle down, during the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique, and the knower, the inner Self of the individual, remains awake in himself, then that Self or *Ātmā*, which is unbounded in space and time, comes to be perceived as the source of thought, the source of all the energy and intelligence that is expressed in the various channels of life and living of the individual.⁵ The inner Self is a field of pure life, a field of pure intelligence, pure wakefulness. It is the stirring, the reverberation of this field of infinite intelligence, the inner Self of every individual, that is the starting point of Vedic speech, according to

Maharishi. The generation of speech from the silence of the Self or Ātmā, is described in verses 6 and 7 of the *Pāṇiniya Śikṣhā*:

आत्मा बुद्ध्या समेत्यार्थान् मनो युङ्क्ते विवक्षया
 मनः कायाग्निमाहन्ति स प्रेरयति मारुतम् ६
 मारुतस्तूरसि चरन्मन्द्रं जनयति स्वरम्

The Self stirs with an intention. Together with the intellect, it takes a direction, and engages the mind. The mind strikes the fire of the body, which in turn drives out the air. The air moving within the lungs, causes the emergence of subtle sound, which becomes sound—*Svaram*—the reverberation of the Self.⁶

The first sound, the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet,⁷ “A” is the reverberation of the Self, the stirring of the unbounded field of pure wakefulness.

II. THE SOUND “A”

The teaching of the Transcendental Meditation technique stems from an ancient Indian tradition called the Vedic tradition, the tradition of “Veda.” The word “Veda” means knowledge, pure knowledge; the Vedic tradition is a tradition of teachers upholding the technology of direct experience of the field of pure knowledge, the Self, and the intellectual understanding of the reverberations of the Self, the stirring of unbounded pure wakefulness in the expressions of pure knowledge, the Veda. The Veda is thousands of years old, preserved in human memory, and recited without variation generation after generation by the Vedic families of India. Maharishi describes the Vedic tradition as a tradition of total knowledge, starting with the sound “A”:

The Vedic tradition is the voice of eternity, and it goes on and on with perfection in its unmanifest value and its manifest value, and how the unmanifest manifests. All that is expressed in the Vedic sounds, Vedic sequentially developing Vedic sounds, starting from one sound “A.” “A” is the first reverberation of total, we can say tradition of knowledge, we can say total knowledge. Total knowledge means eternity—all about silence, all about dynamism. It’s an eternal theme of progression.⁸

On any journey, the starting point, the first step, is like the seed that contains within it the whole progression of the journey up to the final achievement of the goal. Like the first step of a journey, the first sound of the Sanskrit alphabet, which is also the first sound of the Rik Veda, contains the total knowledge in seed form. All the possibilities that can be expressed in speech, are abstractly contained in the first letter, which articulates the potentiality of expression: Whatever knowledge can be expressed in speech in all disciplines and phases of life, has its starting point here, in the very first sound of the Sanskrit alphabet:

The entire infinite variety and its organization and expansion are available in one word “A”—totality—just in one word. It’s like when we are far away from a market, we hear one sound: “hummmmm,” one sound. All the innumerable talks of the market collect in one sound, and they are heard as one syllable, “A.” That is “A,” supposing. As we go nearer and nearer, as we become more acquainted with the sound, we enter into the sound, and then we begin to differentiate many sounds with all other sounds. And when we are in the market, we can talk to a man who is selling oranges or diamonds and this and this and this. But from a distance, one syllable. And that one syllable contains all the sounds of the market.⁹

Like so many different vendors in a marketplace, all the different fields of knowledge merge together in pure abstract potentiality of expression in the sound “A.” From this sound “A” emerge the eight *Svara*, which are the first stage of expansion of the all-possibilities structure of the first Sanskrit alphabet, “A.”

III. THE EIGHT *SVARA*

The Sanskrit word, “*Svara*” means vowel; but on a deeper level, Maharishi explains, it is the reverberation, “*ra*” of the Self, “*sva*.”¹⁰ In the reverberation of the “A,” all the letters of the alphabet are contained; but there is a sequential evolution of sounds, starting from the abstract all-possibilities structure of “A,” and proceeding to more and more concrete, more and more manifest, more and more limited or point value expressions—the openness of the vowels is sequentially clamped down, closed down to

the rigid specificity of the consonants. This progression from abstract to specific, from open throat to closed, from infinity to point, is found already in the first level of expansion of the pure sound “A” into its diverse expressions: Maharishi explains that the first level of expansion is the formation of the eight fundamental, pure vowels, the eight *Svara*. The eight *Svara*, as Maharishi has identified them, range from the completely open throat sound of “A,” to the completely closed sound of “M̄.” Maharishi counts the eight *Svara* to be “A,” “I,” “U,” “Ṛi,” “Lṛi,” “E,” “O,” and “AM̄.”¹¹ In this list of eight, only the pure sound, called a “*Varṇa*” or color of sound, is represented, and not the various alphabets formed from it, such as “A,” “Ā” and “Ā3,” for example. The dipthong “AI” is left out because in pronunciation, first “A” is pronounced, and then “I” is pronounced, whereas “E” is a continuous homogenous sound distinct from both “A” and “I”; similarly “AU” is left out, but “O,” a homogenous vowel sound is included. The eight *Svara* are the fundamental irreducible vowel sounds of the Sanskrit language.¹²

Maharishi explains the evolution of the eight *Svara* from “A”:

How many syllables come up within the “A”? There is a very systematic evolution of “A” into eight: “A,” “I,” “U,” “Ṛi.” These are the alphabets of the Sanskrit language. “A,” “I,” “U”—like that, there are eight. In the eight is “M̄.” “A”—infinity; “M̄,” “Ma,” the point. From infinity to point is the expanded version of the one holistic version of the Constitution of the Universe. And these have been explained in the Vedic Literature in terms of one value: *Ātmā*, *Ātmā*—one value, *Ātmā*. “A”—again, starting from “A”—“A,” significant, one *Ātmā*.¹³

These eight *Svara* are the eight-fold reverberations of the Self, *Ātmā*, and this is the abstract foundation of all Vedic speech. From the eight fundamental *Svara*, all the vowels of the Sanskrit language may be derived.

IV. THE VOWELS OF THE SANSKRIT LANGUAGE

In the traditional recitation of the alphabet, there are 15 vowels

अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ऋ ॠ लृ ए ऐ ओ औ अं अः

a ā i ī u ū ṛi ṛī ḷri e ai o au aṁ aḥ

By contrast, the alphabet used in grammar, the *Pratyāhāra Sūtra*, lists only 9 vowels,

अ इ उ ण ऋ लृक् ए ओइ ऐ औच्

a i uṇ ṛi ḷri k e oṅ ai auc

The list is shortened by allowing a single “A” to stand for short and long versions of the letter, as also for “I,” “U” and “Ṛi”; and by leaving out the *Anusvāra* and *Visarga* entirely.

Taittirīya Prātishākhya¹⁴ asserts that there are sixteen initial *Svara* or vowels:

षोडशादितः स्वराः

ṣhoḍaśhāditaḥ svarāḥ

There is a traditional couplet describing the sixteen *Svara*, and it is presented by

Āpishali,¹⁵ Ātreya¹⁶ and Pāri¹⁷ in their respective *Shikshā* texts:

ह्रस्वदीर्घप्लुतावर्णोवर्णोवर्णा ऋ ऋ लृ च

एदौदौदिति ज्ञेयाः षोडशेहादितः स्वराः

hrasva-dīrgha-plutāvarṇavarṇovarnā ṛi ṛī ḷri ca

edaidodauditi jñeyāḥ ṣhoḍaśchāditaḥ svarāḥ

The couplet requires some explanation: *ह्रस्व Hrasva*, means short, *दीर्घ Dīrgha* means long, and *प्लुत Pluta* refers to the extended long vowels, written with the number three following the letter in the text: The *Pluta* vowel is said to be held for 3 *Mātras*, compared to 1 *Mātra* for the *Hrasva* vowels, and two *Mātras* for the *Dīrgha* vowels.

If the *Samdhi* is pulled apart, so that the contributing words are seen, then the verse becomes more clear:

ह्रस्व-दीर्घ-प्लुत-अवर्ण-इवर्ण-उवर्णः ऋ ऋ लृ च

एद् ऐद् औद् औद् इति ज्ञेयाः षोडश-इह-आदितः स्वराः

hrasva-dīrgha-pluta-avarṇa-ivarṇa-uvarṇāḥ ṛi ṛī ḷri ca

ed aid od aud iti jñeyāḥ ṣhoḍaśha-iha-āditaḥ svarāḥ

The *Varṇa* or sound “A,” as well as the *Varṇa* “I” and the *Varṇa* “U” are found as *Hrasva*, *Dīrgha* and *Pluta*, making for a total of 9 vowels. Added to that are short and long “Ri,” and “Lṛi,” for a total of 12 vowels in the first line of the couplet. The second line uses a terminal “T,” changed to “D” by Samdhi, to separate the dipthong vowels, a traditional notation in grammar used to mark an individual letter.¹⁸ Thus “E,” “AI,” “O,” and “AU,” become “Ed,” “AId,” “Od,” and “AUd.” Then, the word “Iti” is used to denote that this is the end of the list. The verse thus says that there are 16 initial vowels to be learned, and they are:

अ आ आः इ ई ईः उ ऊ ऊः ऋ ॠ लृ ए ऐ ओ औ
a ā āḥ i ī īḥ u ū ūḥ ṛ ṛi ṛiḥ e ai o au

The most well-known Shikshā, is the *Pāṇinīya Śhikṣhā*. The text asserts that there are 21 vowels.¹⁹

स्वरा विंशतिरेकश्च
svarā vimśatirekaś ca

Although the *Pāṇinīya Śhikṣhā* does not enumerate which those 21 vowels are, commentators agree that the additional vowels are made up by the plutas of dipthongs e, ai, o, and au and vocalic ṛ as the fifth. Thus *Pāṇinīya Śhikṣhā*'s list of 21 vowels is:

अ आ आः इ ई ईः उ ऊ ऊः ऋ ॠ ऋः लृ ए एः ऐ ऐः ओ
ओः औ औः
a ā āḥ i ī īḥ u ū ūḥ ṛ ṛi ṛiḥ e eḥ ai aiḥ o oḥ au auḥ²⁰

Finally, a fragment of an ancient Shikshā text by Vasīṣṭha claims that there are 26 vowels:

स्वराः षड्विंशतिः प्रोक्ताः
svarāḥ ṣaḍvimśatiḥ proktāḥ²¹

This is the expansion of the eight *Svara* into the full range of vowels in the Sanskrit alphabet.²² The vowels, arising from their source in “A,” in turn give rise to the consonants.

V. VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

Investigation into the foundation of knowledge of the ancient Vedic civilization, the study of pure knowledge, Veda, is called “Vedic Study.” Vedic Study, Maharishi explains, is not the study of anything outside of oneself.²³ It is the study of the Self, the *Ātmā*. The Self reverberates and expresses itself in the one eternal sound, “A,” and then the one sound, “A,” is seen for its eight-fold values in the eight basic *Svara*, which expand to create all the vowels. Finally, in the full expansion of the sound “A,” there is the formation of consonants from the vowels. The expansion of “A” to all the vowels, and then to the consonants, expresses the collapsing of the abstract to the concrete, the collapsing of infinity to its own point; this is the dynamics of human consciousness, expanding and contracting, reverberating back and forth between its unbounded cosmic status, and its localized finite point value; in this dynamism of reverberation of the Self, the study of the Veda becomes meaningful. Maharishi explains the investigation of the Vedic sounds as the exploration of the relationship between vowels and consonants:

When you study the Vedic Literature, then first you study the vowels and consonants, then you study the gaps between vowels and the consonants. This is studying the nature of the Self. And when you study the nature of the Self, you see that the Self reverberates in terms of its own reverberations and they are the *Svara*; they are the reverberations of *Ātmā*. And they are the vowels.

There are two values in the language, one is vowel and one is consonant—vowels and consonants. This is Vedic Literature, this Vedic language made of vowels—that means reverberations of the Self itself. . . . It is a beautiful sequentially evolving reality of how the singularity of *Ātmā*, the singularity of the Self-Referral intelligence multiplies itself. It multiplies itself as the first syllable—eight syllables—and from there they become the consonants. Consonants are *Vyañjana*, we call it, *Svara* and *Vyañjana*.

Svara means reverberations of the Self, reverberations of the Total Natural Law, *Ātmā*, consciousness. And they then extend into the consonants. Consonants are the syllables where the vowels are attached to other words. Ka, Kha, Ga, Gha. Always “A,” “A,” “A,” “A.” Ka, Kha, Ga, Gha, Ta, Tha, Da, Dha, Pa, Pha, Ba. Always “A,” “A,” “A.” “A” is the first *Svara*, the first vowel. The first vowel “A” is the flow of silence. “Aaaaaaaaaa.” It is sound that carries the character of the infinite value of unified wholeness—“Aaaaaaaaaa.” “Iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.” So “A” stands for silence; “I” stands for dynamism. Like that, the whole conception and the emergence of one syllable from the other syllable—one within the other—huge infinity, and the point of infinity also has the total concentrated value of the Self.²⁴

Here Maharishi has given an expanded microscopic view of the totality of knowledge contained in the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, “A”: What he called, in his analogy, the hum of the marketplace, which was like a roar from a distance, has been resolved, on closer approach, first into the different vowels and then into vowels and consonants, all participating together in the eternal flow of silence. This is how Maharishi explains the ultimate source of all the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in the silence of the Self, or *Ātmā*. The different consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet have been classified and systematized by the authors of the various *Śhikṣhā* texts.

VI. CONSONANTS

Consonants are called *Vyañjana* in Sanskrit. Although there was a considerable range of opinion as to the number of vowels, there is much less diversity of opinion as to how many consonants there are. Here is Gautama’s presentation of the consonants:²⁵

अथ त्रयस्त्रिंशद्द्वयञ्जनानि भवन्ति । स्पर्शान्तस्थोष्माणश्चेति
atha trayas-trimśad vyañjanāni bhavanti , sparśāntasthoṣhmāṇaś ceti

Gautama asserts that there are 33 consonants, and that consonants are of three kinds, *Sparśha*, (full contact consonants), *Antaḥstha* (semi-vowels), and *Uṣhmāṇa* (sibilants).²⁶

1. *Sparśha* (full contact) consonants. Gautama begins by defining the *Sparśha*, or contact consonants:

तत्र ककारादयो मकारान्ताः स्पर्शाः पञ्चविंशतिश्च

tatra kakārādayo makārāntāḥ sparśhāḥ pañcaviṁśatiśhca

The letters starting with the letter “Ka” and ending with the letter “Ma” are the *Sparśha*, and they are twenty-five in number. This apparently alludes to the traditional recitation of the alphabet, in which there are five rows or vargas of five consonants each:

क ख ग घ ङ

च छ ज झ ञ

ट ठ ड ढ ण

त थ द ध न

प फ ब भ म

ka kha ga gha ṅa
cha chha ja jha ṅa
ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṇa
ta tha da dha na
pa pha ba bha ma

Gautama enumerates them differently, separating out the nasal sounds as a separate category within the set of *Sparśha*. His listing nevertheless starts with “Ka” and ends with “Ma”:

अथानन्त्या विंशतिर्भवन्ति ते कचटतपाः खछठथफा

गजडदबा घभ्रढधभाश्चेत्यथान्त्याः पञ्च ते ङजणनमाश्चेति

athānantyā viṁśatir bhavanti te ka-ca-ṭa-ta-pāḥ kha chha ṭha tha phā
ga ja ḍa da bā gha jha ḍha dha bhāścetyathāntyāḥ pañca te ṅa ṅa ṇanamāśceti

Āpishali, Pāri and Ātreya²⁷ present the *Sparśha* in verse form:

कखौ गघौ ङचछजा भ्रजौ टठडढा णतौ

थदौ धनौ पफबभा मः स्पर्शाः पञ्चविंशतिः

ka-khau ga-ghau ṅa-cha-chha-jā jha-ṅau ṭa-ṭha-ḍa-ḍhā ṇa-tau

tha-dau dha-nau pa-pha-ba-bhā maḥ sparśhāḥ pañcaviṁśatiḥ

The *Pratyāhāra Sūtra* of Vedic grammar present the 25 *Sparśha* in six separate *Sūtra*.²⁸ The nasals are presented separately, as one group; the next three *Sūtra* are devoted to the *Ghoṣha* or voiced consonants: Two of these three *Sūtra* are devoted to the voiced aspirated consonants, and then the third one to the voiced unaspirated consonants; finally, eight out of the ten unvoiced, *Aghoṣha* consonants are listed in one *Sūtra* starting with the five aspirated consonants; “Ka” and “Pa” are given their own final *Sūtra*, thus completing the presentation of the *Sparśha* consonants:

अमङ्गानम्

भभञ्

घढधष्

जबगडदश्

खफछठथचटतव्

कपय्

ña-ma-ña-ṇa-nam

jha-bhañ

gha-ḍha-dhaṣḥ

ja-ba-ga-ḍa-daś

kha-pha-cha-ṭha-ṭha-ca-ṭa-tav

ka-pay

Finally, a *Sūtra* from Taittirīya Prātishākhya sums up the *Sparśha* consonants:²⁹

आद्याः पञ्चविंशति स्पर्शाः

ādyāḥ pañcaviṁśati sparśāḥ

The first group of consonants are these 25 full contact consonants called

“*Sparśha*.”

2. Antaḥstha Consonants (semivowels). The second group of consonants that Gautama mentions while defining “*Vyañjana*” are the *Antaḥstha* consonants. *Antaḥstha* are stationed (*stha*) in the middle (*antar*) between vowels and consonants. They do not have the full contact of the *Sparśha* consonants, nor the free flow of the vowel sounds; they are called semi-vowels in English. Gautama says there are four, and they are “Ya,” “Ra,” “La” and “Va”.³⁰

चत्वारोऽन्तस्थास्ते यरलवाः
chatvāro’ntasthās te ya-ra-la-vāḥ

Vasishṭha agrees that there are four:³¹

चत्वारश्च तथान्तस्थाः
chatvāraś cha tathāntasthāḥ

Āmareśhi says similarly:³²

चतस्रो यादयोऽन्तस्थाः
chatasro yādayo’ntasthāḥ

Āpishali, Ātreya and Pāri phrase it metrically:³³

यरौ लवौ चतस्रोऽन्तस्थाश्च
ya-rau la-vau catasro’ntasthāś cha

Yājñavalkya further describes their qualities:³⁴

चत्वार्यन्तस्था यरलवाः कपिलवर्णा अग्निदैवत्याः
chatvāryantasthā ya-ra-la-vāḥ kapilavarṇā agnidaivatyaḥ

In the *Pratyāhāra Sūtra* of Vedic grammar, the letter “Ha” is added to the group, although it is not being classed as a semi-vowel. There are two *Sūtra*:³⁵

हयवरट् लण
ha-ya-va-raṭ laṇ

The Taittirīya Prātishākhya sums up in one *Sūtra*:³⁶

पराश्चतस्रोऽन्तस्थाः

parāś chatasro'ntasthāḥ

3. *Ūṣhman* Consonants (sibilants and ha). The final class of “*Vyañjana*” consonants identified by Gautama are called ऊष्माण (Ūṣhmāṇa). Gautama says that there are four Ūṣhman letters, “Ha,” “Śa,” “Ṣa” and “Sa”:³⁷

चत्वारश्चोष्माणस्ते हशषसाश्चेति

chatvāraś coṣhmāṇas te ha śha ṣha sāś ceti

Yajñavalkya gives the traditional sequence of these four ūṣhman letters:³⁸

चत्वार्यूष्माणः शषसहा अरुणवर्णा आदित्यदैवत्याः

chatvāry-ūṣhmāṇaḥ śha ṣha sa hā aruṇavarṇā ādityadaivatyaḥ

A similar treatment is found in the *Pratyāhāra Sūtra*, where the last two *Sūtra* are devoted to these four Ūṣhman letters:³⁹

शषसर् हल्

śha ṣha sar hal

It is interesting to note that the *Pratyāhāra Sūtra* list the letter “Ha” twice, once as the first of the antaḥstha (semivowel) class, and then again here, directly following the three sibilants.

By contrast, *Vasishṭha*, *Pāri*, *Āpishali*, *Ātreya*, and the *Taittirīya Prātishākhya* all declare that there are six Ūṣhman letters. *Vasishṭha* says:⁴⁰

षडूष्माणः प्रकीर्तिताः

ṣhaḍ ūṣhmāṇaḥ prakīrtitāḥ

Ātreya, *Pāri* and *Āpishali* all identify what the six are with the same metrical expression:⁴¹

च॒क॒श॒ष॒स॒ः॒प॒हाः॒ ष॒डू॒ष्मा॒णः॒

chaḥ ka śha śha saḥ pa hāḥ ṣhaḍ ūṣhmāṇaḥ

Visarga is a breath following a vowel sound, that may be pronounced at the completion of a word. Ancient Indian phoneticians noticed that if the breath or *Visarga* was pronounced directly before a following “Ka,” then the closing or choking down of the throat tended to make the *Visarga* take on a sort of rasping throat sound as the breath rushed by the root of the tongue. They called this transformed *Visarga*, pronounced immediately before a guttural “Ka” or “Kha,” *Jihvāmūliya*. *Jihvā* means tongue, and *Mūla* means root, so the name means “pronounced at the root of the tongue.”

Phoneticians also noticed that if the *Visarga* is pronounced directly before a following “Pa,” then the closing of the lips created a distinctive sort of blowing sound. This transformed visarga is called *Upadhmāniya*. In ancient Vedic language, these two sounds, *Jihvāmūliya* and *Upadhmāniya* are considered different letters, different from the ordinary *Visarga*. They are even given their own symbols. Sometimes they are represented by two different symbols, फ़ and ॠ but more commonly they are both represented by the same symbol फ़ since the context, namely the following “Ka,” or “Kha,” or “Pa,” or “Pha,” makes obvious which of the two is intended. In recent times, the use of a special symbol to denote *Jihvāmūliya* and *Upadhmāniya* has become infrequent, even in Vedic texts, and the two dots of the *Visarga* are often used even when the *Jihvāmūliya* and *Upadhmāniya* are intended. In the above metrical phrase, the *Visarga* preceding the letter “Ka” is the *Jihvāmūliya* and the *Visarga* preceding the letter “Pa” is the *Upadhmāniya*. The letters “Ka” and “Pa” are here used by the seers only to show the special nature of the *Visarga* sounds; “Ka” and “Pa” are not themselves considered part of the series of *Uṣhman* letters. Thus, according to Ātreya, Pāri and Āpishali, the *Uṣhman* letters are:

श ष स ह, (śha śha sa ha), jihvāmūliya and upadhmāniya.⁴²

Taittiriya Prātiśhākya agrees with Ātreya, Pāri and Āpiśhali in declaring the number of the *Ūshman* letters as six.⁴³

परे षडूष्माणः

pare ṣhaḍ ūṣmāṇaḥ

Ṛik Veda Prātiśhākya declares the *Ūshman* letters to be eight:

उत्तरेऽष्टा ऊष्माणः

uttare'ṣṭā ūṣmāṇaḥ

Commentators elaborate that these eight *Ūshman* letters are ha, śha śha sa, *Visarga*, *Jihvāmūliya*, *Upadhmāniya* and *Anusvara*.⁴⁴

These three groups, *Sparśha*, *Antaḥstha* and *Ūshman* comprise the consonants in the Sanskrit alphabet.

VII. ADDITIONAL LETTERS: *CHODITA* AND *YAMA*

4. *Choditas*. There is another class of letters, according to Āpiśhali, called the *Chodita*. The word *Chodita* comes from the root “*cud*,” to impel, incite, cause to move quickly. All are derived from the quick or sudden movement of the breath in the throat, nose or mouth. There are five *Chodita* sounds. The class of six *Ūshman* letters is the first; the *Visarga* is the second; the *Anusvara* is the third, the retroflex “*ḷa*,” is the fourth, and the class of sounds called *Anunāsikya* or simply *Nāsya*, make up the fifth. These are described by Āpiśhali and Pāri, in one line.⁴⁵

विसर्गानुस्वारळाश्चानुनासिक्याः पञ्च चोदिताः ६

visargānusvāraḷāśhchānunāsikyāḥ pañcha choditāḥ 6

The list presents four *Chodita* letters, although counting five: Visarga, anusvāra, “La,” and Anunāsikya. Āpishali and Pāri raise the number to five in a subsequent verse by adding the six *Ūṣhmāṇa* letters as one member of the group of five *Choditas*:⁴⁶

षडूष्माणो विसर्गोऽनुस्वारो लो नास्यपञ्चकम् ९
 ṣhaḍūṣhmāṇo visargo’nusvāro ḷo nāsyapañchakam 9

The *Ūṣhmāṇa* letters and *Visarga* have already been described.

The *Anusvāra* or “Am,” is handled differently in each of the four Vedas, and the name and symbol are often pre-empted in the later classical literature as a short-hand for a final nasal, or a nasalized vowel. However, the pure *Anusvāra* is something different.

L. Aravind explains the pure Vedic *Anusvāra*:

The Śhaunaka, Māṇḍūkya, Pāṇini and other authorities have declared that the *Anusvāra* “M” in its original state is a voiced sound involving only the *Nāsika* and no other oral articulation (e.g. anusvāra yamānām cha nāsikā sthānam uchyate). This differentiates it from the other *Anunāsikas* such as “ma,” “na,” “ṇa,” “ñā,” and “ṅa,” which are sounds with specific oral articulations that are tinged with passage of air through the nasal cavity. In the pure *Anusvāra* the mouth is kept naturally closed without forming any particular articulation and the air is allowed to pass, superficially contacting the oral cavity into the nasal cavity. However, it does not pass into the oral cavity to resonate within it.⁴⁷

The *Anusvāra* is considered to be purely a nasal sound, i.e., air is moving through the nostrils only during the pronunciation of *Anusvāra*. A quite different treatment of *Anusvāra* is found in some recensions of Yajur-Veda, Abhyankar explains. The *Anusvāra* may be treated “As a kind of consonant of the type of nasalized half “Ga,” (गम्) as described in some treatises of the Yajur-veda Prātiśhākhya .”⁴⁸

The *Anunāsikya* is uttered through the nose and mouth both, as different from the *Anusvāra* which is uttered only through the nose. The five nasals ङञणम (ṅa ṇa ṇa na m) of the *Sparśha* class are considered *Anunāsikya*; three of the four semi-vowels, “Ya,” “La,” and “Va,” and all the vowels may all be nasalized, becoming

Anunāsikya. These *Anunāsikya* semi-vowels and vowels are marked with chandrabindu ◌̣. The remaining *Chodita* is a retroflex “Ḷa.” The retroflex “Ḷa,” ळ is substituted in the ancient Vedic language for the retroflex ढ (Ḷa) when the “Ḷa” is preceded and followed by a vowel. The verb Ḷde (ईडे) which is the second word of Rik Veda, “I adore,” is changed to Ḷḷe (ईळे). These five, *Uṣhmāṇa*, *Visarga*, *Anusvāra*, ळ, (Ḷa,) and *Anunāsikya*, are the five *Chodita* described by Āpishali and Pāri.

5. Yama. There is another very important group of letters, called the *Yama*.

According to a contemporary dictionary writer, a *Yama* is:

one of a pair, a twin letter available in pronunciation before a nasal letter and similar to it, when the nasal consonant is preceded by any one of the four consonants of the five classes; the *Yama* is a transitional sound intervening between a non-nasal and the following nasal, as a counterpart of the non-nasal.⁴⁹

In the conjunct “gn” in agnim, for example, the letter “Ga” succeeds in bringing the flow of speech to a complete stop. In order to pronounce the “Na,” some vibration must first be supplied to the voice box or larynx. This momentary stirring of sound in the voice box is considered to be a letter in its own right, called a *Yama*. There are four different kinds of *Yama*, according to whether the consonant preceding the nasal is hard or soft, aspirated or unaspirated. Yājñavalkya describes the *Yama* very succinctly, giving four examples, and the four names of the *Yama*:

कम खम गम घम कुं खुं गुं घुं इति यमाश्चत्वारः

kma khma gma ghma kuṁ khuṁ guṁ ghūṁ iti yamāśhchatvāraḥ

Gautama describes in detail the unique position of the *Yama* with respect to a preceding consonant and following nasal:

अथानन्त्या विंशतिर्भवन्ति ते कचटतपाः खछठथफा

गजडदबा घभृढधभाश्चेत्यथान्त्याः पञ्च ते डजणनमाश्चेति

अथानन्त्याश्चत्वारस्ते सयमास्ते कुं खुं गुं घुं

इत्यनन्त्यान्त्यसंयोगेऽनन्त्यपूर्वेऽनन्त्योत्तरे व्यवधानवर्जिते
तत्र यमा वर्तन्ते न संशय इति

athānantyā vimśatirbhavanti te ka ca ṭa ta pāḥ kha chha ṭha tha phā
ga ja ḍa da bā gha jha ḍha dha bhāṣh chetyathāntyāḥ pañcha te ṇa ṅa ṇa na māṣh cheti
athānantyāṣh chatvāras te sayamās te kuṁ kḥuṁ guṁ ghuṁ
ityanantyāntyasamyoge'nantypūrve'nantyoottare vyavadhānavarjite
tatra yamā varttante na saṁśhaya iti

Gautama says:

Now, the non-final letters (*Anantya*)(of the five *Vargas* or rows of consonants) are 20: They are Ka, Ca, Ṭa, Ta, Pa; Kha, Cha, Ṭha, Tha, Pha; Ga Ja Ḍa Da Ba, and Gha, Jha, Ḍha, Dha, and Bha.

Now, the final letters (*Antya*)(of the five *Vargas*) are five:

They are Ṇa, ṅa, ṇa, Na and Ma.

Now, the non-final letters are of four kinds, corresponding to four *Yama*, Kum, Khum, Gum, and Ghum.

When a non-final letter is conjunct with a final letter, then in the gap before the final, but after the non-final letter, when there is no pause between the final and non-final letter, there the *Yama* reside without doubt.⁵⁰

Starting from pure consciousness, *Ātmā*, this chapter has examined the emergence of the alphabet from pure silence, starting with the expression of the first sound, the first letter of the alphabet, “A.” The first letter, “A,” was seen to contain all the letters of the alphabet in seed form. The first sound, “A,” gave rise to the eight *Svara*, which in turn gave rise to all the vowels. The vowels in turn gave rise to the progressively collapsing sequence of consonants, the semivowels, the sibilants, and finally the full contact consonants or *Sparśha*. The furthest limit of this progression may be seen in the *Yama*. The *Yama* are not so much distinct letters, as a tangible manifest expression of the gap between letters, that value which holds two sounds together. The gap holding two sounds together reveals the underlying continuum of speech, the continuum of the sound “A,” that was the starting point of speech. The gap points to the continuum that is here made manifest as vibration: Here in the gap between letters, there is yet a sign of that unmanifest value of speech, the source of speech, consciousness, *Ātmā*. It may be

inferred that by bringing the attention to the existence of this phase of speech, the *Yamas*, Gautama is laying out to vision the existence of a greater value of *Yama*, *Yama* the administrator: Organizing the collapse and emergence of successive sounds—the death and rebirth of sounds, one might say—*Yama* is found administering the entire field of speech by organizing the joining together of innumerable syllables into one continuum of flow of the totality of life. Thus it is seen that the alphabet letters called *Yama* may be understood as the organizing power of the mind made tangible; at once silent and dynamic, they exude the nature of unmanifest pure Transcendental Consciousness, that is the ultimate source of all the letters of the alphabet. Not carrying meaning, they remain unnoticed, but by energizing the gap, the field of transformation between letters, they are responsible for the diversity of expressions on the surface of speech.

The *Choditas* and the *Yamas* are the final two groups of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet to be learned. With this knowledge of the whole range of the Sanskrit alphabet as taught by the sages who wrote the ancient Śhikṣhā texts, it is now possible to count the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, and the various discrepancies in the numbers of letters propounded in different texts can be understood.

VIII. THE SANSKRIT ALPHABET

Maharishi has described the Sanskrit Alphabet as a perfect system of quantification of totality.⁵¹ The infinite continuum of the total potential of Natural Law, reverberating in the Self, gets quantified in speech, when the fully opened mouth, expressing the continuum of the sound “A,” the infinity of Being, is progressively collapsed down to a point in the sound “Ka,” in which the vibrations of sound are completely nil, and the breath is completely stopped—speech is brought to a standstill. It has been seen how systematically, in this collapse of infinity into a point, from “A” into “Ka,” from the abstract to the concrete, all the sounds of the Vedic alphabet emerge

sequentially. From the starting point of “A,” first the eight *Svara* emerge, expanding to all the vowels, and then from the vowels, the different classes of consonants emerge.

The Sanskrit alphabet is called “*Varṇa-samāmnāya*,” which means traditional collection of the letters of the Vedic alphabet. Collections of letters are found in the ancient Shikshā texts written by the great Maharshis of previous ages, and in the Prātishākhya of the various Veda, and in the text of Vedic grammar. These ancient texts often give more elaborate, more detailed and precise presentations of the alphabet, than the traditional recitations taught in schools and colleges. The traditional recitation of the Sanskrit alphabet involves 48 letters. (Please refer to Table 1, *Varṇa Samāmnaya*.)

Vasishṭha presents a Vedic alphabet of 68 letters, Pāṇini suggests that there are 63 or 64 letters. (Please refer to Table 2, Pāṇini’s alphabet.) Ātreya counts 59 letters, while Āpishali and Pāri list 56 letters each. The Taittirīya Prātishākhya presents 51 letters, (Table 3), while in the *Pratyāhāra Sūtra* of *Vyākaraṇa*, (Table 4) only 42 are given. His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in the context of comparing the Vedic alphabet to the 64 codons of the genetic code, suggested that there were 64 letters in the Vedic alphabet. (Please refer to Table 2). However in the context of learning the alphabet in order to enter into the reading and recitation of the Vedic Literature, he has set a number of 52 letters in the Vedic alphabet.⁵² The 52 letter Vedic alphabet includes the 48 sounds of the *Varṇa Samāmnāya* (Table 1) augmented by *Jihvāmūlīya* and *Upadhmanīya*, and the retroflex semi-vowels “ḷa” and “ḷha.” (Please refer to Table 5: 52 Letter Alphabet.) This is the syllabary to be learned by students in the Vedic Literature reading program. The Vedic texts provide a number of additional orthographic peculiarities: There are accents that are noted differently and pronounced differently in the four Vedas; and in *Yajur Veda* there are a variety of symbols for *Visarga*, and *Anusvāra*. These will be reviewed, starting with the Vedic accents.

Table 1: Varṇa Samāmnaya

Traditional Recitation of the Sanskrit Alphabet

वर्णसमाम्नय

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛi	ṛī	ḷri
ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः			
e	ai	o	au	aṁ	aḥ			
	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ			
	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa			
	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ			
	cha	chha	ja	jha	ña			
	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण			
	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa			
	त	थ	द	ध	न			
	ta	tha	da	dha	na			
	प	फ	ब	भ	म			
	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma			
य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह	
	ya	ra	la	va	śha	ṣha	sa	ha

Table 2: Pāṇini's Alphabet

Based on *Pāṇiniya Śikṣhā*

अ	आ	आ३	इ	ई	ई३	उ	ऊ	ऊ३
a	ā	ā3	i	ī	ī3	u	ū	ū3
ऋ	ॠ	ऋ३	ऌ	ॡ	ए३	ऐ	ऐ३	
ṛi	ṛī	ṛī3	ḷri	e	e3	ai	ai3	
		ओ	ओ३	औ	औ३			
		o	o3	au	au3			
		क	ख	ग	घ	ङ		
		ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa		
		च	छ	ज	झ	ञ		
		cha	chha	ja	jha	ña		
		ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण		
		ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa		
		त	थ	द	ध	न		
		ta	tha	da	dha	na		
		प	फ	ब	भ	म		
		pa	pha	ba	bha	ma		
	य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह
	ya	ra	la	va	śha	ṣha	sa	ha
कुं	खुं	गुं	घुं	अं	अः	◌	÷	ळ ळह
kum	khum	gum	ghum	aṃ	aḥ	jihvāmūliya	upadhmanīya	ḷ ḷha

Table 3: Taittirīya Prātiśhākhyā's Alphabet

अ	आ	आ३	इ	ई	ई३	उ	ऊ	ऊ३
a	ā	ā3	i	ī	ī3	u	ū	ū3
ऋ	ॠ	लृ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ		
ṛi	ṛī	ḷri	e	ai	o	au		
		क	ख	ग	घ	ङ		
		ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa		
		च	छ	ज	झ	ञ		
		cha	chha	ja	jha	ña		
		ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण		
		ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa		
		त	थ	द	ध	न		
		ta	tha	da	dha	na		
		प	फ	ब	भ	म		
		pa	pha	ba	bha	ma		
य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह	
ya	ra	la	va	śha	ṣha	sa	ha	
		ॠ	ऌ	अः	अं	अँ		
		jihvāmūḷīya	upadhmanīya	aḥ	aṃ	aṅ		

Table 4: Pratyāhāra Sūtra of Vyākaraṇa

अ इ उ ण्	a i u (ṅ)
ऋ लृ क्	ṛi ṛi (k)
ए ओ ङ्	e o (ṅ)
ऐ औ च्	ai au (ch)
हयवरट्	ha ya va ra (t)
लण्	la (ṅ)
जमङणनम्	ña ma ña ṇa na (m)
भभञ्	jha bha (ñ)
घढधष्	gha ḍha dha (ṣh)
जबगडदश्	ja ba ga ḍa da (śh)
खफछठथचटतव्	kha pha chha ṭha tha cha ṭa ta (v)
कपय्	ka pa (y)
शषसर्	śha ṣha sa (r)
हल्	ha (l)

Table 5: 52-Letter Vedic Alphabet
of the Vedic Literature Reading Curriculum

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛi	ṛī	ṛi
	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः		
e	ai	o	au	am	aḥ			
	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ			
	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa			
	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ			
	cha	chha	ja	jha	ña			
	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण			
	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa			
	त	थ	द	ध	न			
	ta	tha	da	dha	na			
	प	फ	ब	भ	म			
	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma			
य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह	
ya	ra	la	va	śha	ṣha	sa	ha	
		ॠ	ॡ	ळ	ळ्ह			

IX. VEDIC LETTERS AND MARKS

1. Vedic Accents. The Ṛik Veda is chanted, and there are different tones or accents that are traditionally marked in the text. The three accents in the Ṛik Veda are the *Udātta*, the *Anudātta*, and the *Svarita*. The *Anudātta*, or un-raised pitch is the low tone. It is marked with a horizontal line below the syllable. The *Svarita* is a high pitch, or sliding note; it is marked with a vertical line above the syllable. The *Udātta* or raised tone, is not marked; also unaccented syllables are not marked. The first verse of Ṛik Veda looks as follows with these accent markings:

अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवमृत्विजम् । होतारं रत्नधातमम् १

Ṛik Veda also has what is called a *Kampa* accent, which may be short or long, and is written accordingly with a 1 or a 3, having both a *Svarita* accent above the number, and an *Anudātta* accent mark below. An example is shown from *Sūkta* 2, verse 6:

मृद्विशुत्था धिया नरा ६

The Sāma Veda Samhitā uses an entirely different system of notation. The *Udātta* accent is written as a “1” above the syllable. The *Svarita* accent is written as a “2” above the syllable. The *Anudatta* is written as a “3” above the syllable. “2U” and “2R” are additional kinds of *Svarita* accents, called appropriately *Svarita U* and *Svarita Ra*. “3K” is a special *Anudatta* accent called *Anudātta Ka*, and finally there is a *Sāmavedic U* accent written as an “U” above the syllable.⁵³ The first verse of Sāma Veda looks as follows with these accent markings:

१ २ ३ १ २ ३ १ २ ३ २ ३ १ २
अग्नि आ याहि वीतये गृणानो हव्यदातये
१ २ २ ३ १ २
नि होता सत्सि बर्हिषि १

The Atharva Veda uses accent markings similar to those of Ṛik Veda, with the

addition of the *Jātya Svarita* accent, which is an unusual flourish: ∫ The first verse of Atharva Veda looks as follows, with a *Jātya Svarita* accent just past the middle of the second line:

ये त्रिषप्ताः परि॒यन्ति॒ विश्वा॑ रू॒पाणि॒ बिभ्र॑तः ।
वा॒चस्पति॑र्बला॒ तेषां॑ त॒न्वो॑ ∫ अ॒द्य द॑धातु मे ॥१॥

The Śukla Yajur Veda accentuation system includes a symbol for a *Jātya Svarita* that is like a cursive “w,” written below the syllable; there is also an *Antargami Anudāṭṭa*, a horizontal line below the syllable, that has a short vertical hook attached on the left side; and the symbol for *Anudāṭṭa* in Śukla Yajur Veda notation is a curved horizontal line below the syllable, rather than a straight line. Verse 11 of the first chapter is shown as an example:

भू॒ताय॑ त्वा॒ नारा॑तये॒ स्वर॑भि॒विर॑व्येषु॒न्दृ॑ह॒न्तान्दु॑र्षा॒ं पृथि॑व्या
मु॒र्वन्त॑रि॒क्ष्मन्वे॑मि
पृथि॑व्यास्त्वा॒ नाभौ॑ सा॒दयाम्य॑दि॒त्याऽउ॒पस्थेऽग्ने॑ ह॒व्य॑ र॒क्ष ११

The Kṛiṣṇa Yajur Veda accentuation system varies in different recensions. The *Taittirīya* typically uses the system employed for Ṛik Veda. *Kāthaka* marks a *Svarita* with a caret below the syllable.⁵⁴

त्

Anudāṭṭa is marked with a vertical line below the syllable.

त

The *Jātya Svarita* is marked with a curved horizontal line below the syllable:

त

This latter mark is also used by *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*. *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*, although following largely the accentuation system of Ṛik Veda, also uses a special *Svarita* mark consisting of three vertical lines above the syllable.⁵⁵

॥
त

There is also a “Sentence-ending” *Udātta* consisting of two dots below the syllable, used in texts of Kṛiṣṇa Yajur-Veda.⁵⁶

तः

2. Visarga. Śhukla Yajur Veda utilizes several additional marks for *Visarga*, the breath-like or “ha” sound at the end of words. These different marks provide information regarding accentuation and associated hand-movements. The first *Visarga* looks like a division sign, and is used when the *Visarga* follows the *Svarita* accent. Here is an example from verse 1 of Śhukla Yajur Veda:

इषे त्वोर्जे त्वा वायव स्थ देवो वः सविता प्रार्पयतु श्रेष्ठतमायु

The *Visarga* that have a semi-circle facing left or right, positioned around the upper or lower dot signal that the hand moves up or down, or left or right. Here is an example from verse 17:

षम्परिधिम्पर्षधत्थाऽऽग्ने देव पाणिभिर्गुह्यमानः ।
तन्तऽएतमनु जोषम्भराम्येष नेत्त्वदपचेतयाताऽऽग्नेः
प्रियम्पाथोपीतम् १७

3. Anusvāra. There are more than half a dozen symbols for the *Anusvāra*. The *Anusvāra* is usually written as a dot above the line of the syllable it follows. However, in the *Taittirīya* branch of Kṛiṣṇa Yajur Veda, as well as in Sāma Veda, the *Anusvāra* is written differently. It is written as a *Chandra-bindu*, written slightly below, and following

the horizontal line of the preceding syllable; it has a *Virāma* or halant written below it.

Here is an example from the second verse of the *Taittirīya Samhitā*.

य॒ज्ञस्य॑ घ॒ोषदसि॒ प्रत्यु॑ष्ट्रं॒रक्षः॑

In Yajur Veda there is a special *Anusvāra* that signals that thumb and forefinger touch briefly: This is shown below with some of its common variants:⁵⁷

त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒

There is a special *Anusvāra* used when the above *Anusvāra* follows short *Mātrās*, and is followed in turn by the letters “Śha,” “Ṣha,” “Sa,” “Ha,” or “Ri.”⁵⁸

त॑

Some other symbols for *Anusvāra* are:⁵⁹

त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒

Here is an example showing the use of different *Anusvāras*, from verse 1 of chapter 4 of Śhukla Yajur Veda:

ऋ॒क्स्रामा॑भ्यां॑ सु॒न्तर॑न्तो ष॒र्जुर्भी॑ रा॒यस्पोषे॑ण॒ समि॑षा म॒देम॑ ।
 इ॒माऽआ॑पु॒ह श॑मु॒ मे स॑न्तु दे॒वीरोष॑धे॒ त्राय॑स्व॒ स्वधि॑ते॒ मैर्न॑
 हि॒सी॑ १

4. Special “Ya” in Śhukla Yajur Veda. One can see in the above line, that there is an unusual letter “Ya,” that has an oblique line drawn through it: ष This occurs frequently in Śhukla Yajur Veda. This letter is used to represent a “Ya,” which although grammatically a true “Ya,” is pronounced as “Ja.”

These are the special symbols used to represent Vedic Sanskrit. (Please refer to Table 6: Special Vedic Characters).

Table 6: Special Vedic Characters

कुं	खुं	गुं	घुं	ळ	ळ्ह	ष
kum̐	khum̐	gum̐	ghum̐	ḷa	ḷha	ya/ja

Anusvāra: त॑ त॒ त॒ त॒ त॒ त॒

त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒ त॑ त॒

Visarga: त॑ त॒ त॑

Vedic Accents

अ॑	अ॒	अ॒	अ॒
R̥gVeda Svarita	R̥gVeda Anudāṭṭa	Short Kampa	Long Kampa

अ॒	व॒	य॑	व॒
Anudāṭṭa Śhukla Yajur-Veda	Antargami Anudāṭṭa Śhukla Yajur-Veda	Svarita Śhukla Yajur-Veda	Jātya Svarita Śhukla Yajur-Veda

त॑	त॑	त॑
Kāṭhaka Svarita	Kāṭhaka Anudāṭṭa	Kāṭhaka Jātya Svarita

त॑	त॑	त॑
Maitrāyaṇīya Jātya Svarita	Maitrāyaṇīya Svarita	Maitrāyaṇīya Sentence Ending Udāṭṭa

१ आ	२ अ	२२ आ	२३ आ
Sāma Veda Udāṭṭa	Sāma Veda Svarita	Sāma Veda "Svarita ra"	Sāma Veda "Svarita u"

३ अ	३क अ	उ आ	┌
Sāma Veda Anudāṭṭa	Sāma Veda "Anudāṭṭa Ka"	Sāma Veda "U"	Atharva Veda Jātya Svarita

X. THE VALUE OF READING VEDIC LITERATURE

The alphabet emerges sequentially from the eternal continuum of the sound “A,” through the eight *Svara*, and the evolution of all the vowels, to the semi-vowels and sibilants, and finally to the full contact consonants, called Sparśha. The underlying theme has been that “A” is the reverberation of one’s own consciousness when it is awake in itself, when it is referring only to itself, not to anything outside of itself: self-referral consciousness, reverberating within itself between the unbounded infinite continuum of its own nature, and the restricted finite point of its own nature, systematically gives rise to the sequentially unfolding sounds of the Vedic alphabet. The sounds of the Vedic Literature are the reverberations of the *Ātmā*, the reverberations of one’s own Self. Reading Vedic Literature is a procedure, which combined with direct experience of the Self through the practice of the Transcendental Meditation technique, enlivens in individual human awareness the dynamics of evolution of consciousness, the mechanics whereby consciousness, the field of total natural law, expresses itself in the material world and creates the diverse universe. Having seen how the Vedic sounds emerge systematically from the field of consciousness, the field of the Self, Maharishi’s vision of the culturing of perfection through the recitation of the Vedic Literature can be understood: Maharishi sums up his theme of unfolding the latent potential of the individual through recitation of the sounds of the Vedic Literature as follows:

Life is expressed through words. Vedic chanting are the words of consciousness—consciousness reverberates. So the Self of everyone is the consciousness of everyone. So Vedic Sounds—Vedic Mantras we call it to distinguish it from other sounds, ordinary sounds—so these are the Mantras from the Transcendental Field. They are the reverberations of the self-referral consciousness. And the whole physical universe is the expression of these sounds, these vibrations. It is not a matter of belief.

When you study the sounds of the mantras and you study the gaps between sounds, then you understand that the reverberations of these sounds, they are the speech of the Self. It is the *Ātmā* that reverberates. It is called *Svara*. It is called

the reverberations of *Ātmā*, it is called the reverberations of the Self. So Vedic reverberations of the Self, they are always at the basis of the evolutionary impulse of activity, evolutionary. That is why they are always soothing, because they are the generators of evolution, the generators of evolution.⁶⁰

“Generating evolution” is the goal of the program of reading the Vedic Literature.

This revered goal of raising life to perfection, unfolding the infinite potential of the human nervous system, is possible to attain, because the infinite dynamism of the *Ātmā*, which is the energy, intelligence and organizing power at the basis of the whole Creation, is structured in the sounds of the Vedic alphabet.

XI. THE *ṚICHO AKṢHARE* VERSE FROM *ṚIK VEDA*.

The program of reading the Vedic Literature is based upon the Sanskrit Alphabet. This chapter has systematically presented the sounds of the Vedic alphabet, and the *Devanāgarī* script used to represent those sounds. But rather than starting with the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, and proceeding through the various letters of the Classical Sanskrit, and ancient Vedic alphabets, this chapter began with a discussion of the source of alphabet, the source of thought, pure consciousness. In subsequent sections, the entire alphabet was unfolded as a sequential collapse of infinity onto a point: The fully open throat, characteristic of the sound “A,” collapsing, contracting more and more, moving through all the vowels, the semi-vowels, the sibilants, and the full consonants consonants, until the continuum of sound represented by the first letter, “A,” has been completely brought to a stop, arrested in a point. And even the farthest most remote point from this beginning “A,” the *Yama*, were seen as the representative of the underlying continuum of consciousness at the source of speech. This collapse of infinity onto a point, is called in Vedic Science the *Kṣhara* of “A,” the collapse of “A.” The word *Akṣhara*, which in Sanskrit means “letter,” also may be understood as *A-kṣhara*, the *Kṣhara*, collapse, of “A.”

When the alphabet is seen as the unfoldment of the inherent dynamism contained in the collapse of the continuum onto a point—that means when the alphabet is seen as the expression of the dynamics of one’s own infinite, eternal self-referral consciousness or *Ātmā*, collapsing onto its own point, and expanding again to infinity in an eternal reverberation—then it is seen that in the study of the alphabet, it is actually the source of alphabet, consciousness, that is of primary importance. The primacy of consciousness, unfolded for its full range of possibilities by the collapse of infinity onto a point, by the collapse, *Kṣhara*, of “A,” is the theme of understanding that is described in the *Richo Akṣhare* verse of Ṛik Veda. This one verse contains in seed form the knowledge of all disciplines.⁶¹ Faculty of Maharishi University of Management have developed *Richo Akṣhare* charts for all the major disciplines and their varied subdivisions. The charts show how the overall theme of knowledge in each discipline, and in its various branches can be organized in terms of the structure of knowledge unfolded in the *Richo Akṣhare* verse.⁶² This parallel between the structure of knowledge in the modern sciences, and in the ancient Vedic Science may be seen also in the study of the sounds of the Vedic language. Table 7 reviews the parallel between the knowledge of the alphabet and its source in *Ātmā*, and the theme of pure knowledge, total knowledge, contained in the *Richo Akṣhare* verse. Maharishi’s translation of the verse is used as the starting point.

In this way, the *Richo Akṣhare* verse shows how the understanding and experience of the Vedic alphabet as the expression of the dynamism of one’s own *Ātmā*, one’s own unbounded Self, is the gateway to unfolding the infinite potential of human existence and living life in Enlightenment. This understanding is the foundation for beginning the program of reading Vedic Literature. This explains why Maharishi has presented two components of Vedic study, side by side: Reading the Vedic Literature in



Table 7A: *Ṛicho Akshare Chart (first half)*

The Vedic Alphabet in One Verse of Ṛik Veda—Ṛik Veda 1.164.39

**V
E
D
I
C**

<p>ऋ॒चो अ॒क्षरै॑</p> <p>RICHO AKSHARE</p> <p>The verses of the Veda exist in the collapse of fullness (the kshara of ‘A’)</p>	<p>पर॒मे व्यो॑म॒न्</p> <p>PARAME VYOMAN</p> <p>...in the transcendental field, self-referral consciousness, the Self</p>	<p>यस्मि॑न्दे॒वा</p> <p>YASMIN DEVA</p> <p>In which reside all the devas, the impulses of creative intelligence, the Laws of Nature</p>	<p>अधि॑ वि॒श्वे</p> <p>नि॒षेदुः</p> <p>ADHIVISHVE NISHEDUH</p> <p>...responsible for the whole manifest universe</p>
---	--	---	--

**A
L
P
H
A
B
E
T**

<p>The letters of the alphabet arise from the sequential closing of the fully open throat, characteristic of “A,” to its fully closed, choked down, full-stop character expressed in “Ka.”</p>	<p>The open sound, “A,” presents the unbounded continuum of pure consciousness, and the consonantal stop presents the point value, the arresting of that continuum in a point; the continuum of “A,” and the point of any consonant, “Ka,” reside in the inherent dynamism of consciousness, reverberating between infinity and point: they have their basis in the transcendental unmanifest field of speech.</p>	<p>All the letters of the Vedic alphabet emerge from the progressive sequential collapsing of the continuum of “A” onto its own point.</p>	<p>These Vedic sounds emerging from the collapse of “A,” go to participate in all the mantra of the Veda and all the verses of the Vedic Literature, encompassing the total knowledge and organizing power at the basis of the whole creation.</p>
--	--	--	--

Table 7B: *Richo Akshare Chart (second half)*

<p>यस्तन्न वेद् YASTANNA VEDA He whose awareness is not open to this field...</p>	<p>किमृचा करिष्यति KIMRICHA KARISHYATI ...what can the verses accomplish for him?</p>	<p>य इत्तद् विदुस् YA ITTADVIDUS Those who know this level of reality...</p>	<p>त इमे समासते TA IME SAMASATE ...are established in evenness, wholeness of life.</p>
---	---	--	--

<p>Without the experience of the Self awake in its own Nature, infinite and unbounded, eternally reverberating between infinity and point, the individual letters and words can only refer to limited, bound realities of the external world, they cannot tell the story of self-referral consciousness, <i>Ātmā</i>, ever creating infinite possibilities from within its own eternal Reality.</p>	<p>The letters of the Vedic alphabet, interpreted in terms of the manifest objects and activities of the phenomenal world, become fairy tales and myths, without any foundation; they lose their source in the infinite knowledge and organizing power of the Self. Reading the texts of Vedic Literature without experiencing pure consciousness through the regular practice of the Transcendental Meditation program is of little value because the reference to the infinite potential located deep within every human being is missing.</p>	<p>Those who experience pure consciousness and its self-referral fluctuations, enjoy the individual impulses of sound of the Vedic Literature as the self-referral transformations of their own pure consciousness; the qualities of each branch of Vedic Literature are awakened in their awareness by reading and hearing the text of that branch.</p>	<p>When all the different channels of consciousness represented by all the 40 branches of Veda and Vedic Literature have been experienced as the self-referral fluctuations of one's own pure consciousness, then one's own pure wakefulness is fully awake to the infinite possibilities within its own structure, and life is lived in affluence and abundance and perpetual bliss consciousness. This is life in enlightenment.</p>
---	--	--	--

sequence, and experiencing one's own self-referral consciousness through the practice of the Transcendental Meditation program. Without the experience of the unboundedness of the Self through the TM program, the power of the Vedic sounds for uplifting life, for generating evolution could not be practically realized.

Knowledge of the Vedic alphabet is prerequisite to entering into the examination of the actual sequence of texts to be read. The Vedic alphabet is the necessary foundation for reading the Vedic Literature from beginning to end. Chapter 9 returns to the theme of the emergence of the alphabet from the reverberations of the Self, the *Ātmā*, in order to analyze the mechanics underlying the effectiveness of the reading program for achieving life in enlightenment, spontaneously harnessing the infinite organizing power of Natural Law in every thought and action.

XI. CURRICULUM FOR READING THE VEDĀṄGA

In the following chapters a model curriculum for reading the six Vedāṅga is presented. The curriculum is intended as a resource for teachers on the graduate, undergraduate and high school levels; it can also be used as a reader since there are sample readings from each of the texts of the Vedāṅga, presented in proper sequence, as well as graphic presentation of His Majesty King Nader Rām's discovery of the correlate in the physiology of every text of the Vedāṅga.

In the doctoral program in Maharishi Vedic Science at Maharishi University of Management, students read through the entire Vedic Literature in two and a half years. At least three months (about 300 hours of reading) are usually devoted to Vedāṅga. On this schedule, students can read about one third of the full corpus of texts of Kalpa, and all of the five other branches of Vedāṅga, before proceeding to the texts of the remaining 30 branches of Vedic Literature. The curriculum of reading for the 30 branches following the Vedāṅga is presented in Appendix I.

In the undergraduate major in Maharishi Vedic Science at Maharishi University of Management, there is a series of four consecutive one-month courses devoted to reading the Vedāṅga. In the first month, students read all 36 texts of Śhikṣhā. In the second month, they read excerpts of Kalpa and all of Vyākaraṇa, Vedic grammar, reading Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, as always, purely for its sound value, not for meaning. In the third month the students read the *Nighaṇṭu* and Nirukta, and the textbook of Chhandas, and in the fourth month they read through all of the *Bṛihad Pārāśhara Horā Śhāstra*, the main sourcebook of Jyotiṣh.

In the upper school of Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment (9–12), situated on the campus of Maharishi University of Management, where Sanskrit study is part of the school curriculum, students become familiar with the reading process by reading the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the six *Darśhana*, and the fifteen principle Upaniṣhad. When these are completed, then usually in the senior year, they may begin reading Śhikṣhā.

Many graduates of the undergraduate program in Maharishi Vedic Science, and graduates of the Masters program in Maharishi Vedic Science at Maharishi University of Management embark on reading through the total Vedic Literature on their own. Students in the “life” reading program generally read through all the available packages of knowledge as summarized in Chapters 3 through 8, and in Appendix I of this dissertation, and as presented in completeness on the website of Maharishi University of Management, at MUM.edu/vedicreserve.

It is intended that every student should profoundly own in his awareness the connection between the text of Vedic Literature and the corresponding fibre or structure in the physiology. Maharishi explains:

The entire Vedic Literature has been discovered as the structuring dynamics of Ṛik Veda on one side and the structuring dynamics of the human physiology on the other side.

Therefore, the complete knowledge of the Veda and Vedic Literature—the complete knowledge of Natural Law—is vital for everyone who wants to enjoy daily life fully supported by Natural Law.

Maharishi Vedic University allows the student to identify himself with complete knowledge. Complete knowledge means intellectual understanding of the structures of knowledge available in the Vedic Literature and experience of consciousness, which is the common source of all these structures of knowledge.

The student identifies the structures of knowledge in the Vedic Literature with different areas of his own physiology. In this theme of study he identifies himself with the structure of total knowledge and spontaneously allows knowledge and its organizing power to be a living reality of his daily life.⁶³

Similarly it is intended that the student should have a general knowledge of the trend of surface meaning of the text,⁶⁴ as well as intellectual understanding of Maharishi's one-word synopsis of the quality or theme of knowledge in that field. This background of knowledge will support and strengthen experiences that emerge from the practice of reading the Vedic Literature. In courses on reading the Vedic Literature in Sanskrit, the one-word synopsis, the correlate in the physiology, and the overall trend of meaning should be learned by each student as a framework for understanding his experiences of reading the texts, and these are presented for each text in the following chapters. It is hoped that bringing together all these points related to each text of Vedāᅅga in one written curriculum will simplify and enrich the process of learning for teacher and student alike.

The six chapters of this dissertation devoted to the Vedāᅅga are a model curriculum, that could in time be expanded to incorporate all the 40 branches of Veda and Vedic Literature. As a first step in that direction, a comprehensive descriptive bibliography of all the texts in the reading curriculum for the remaining branches of Vedic Literature is presented in Appendix I.

Notes:

¹ Wallace, R. Keith, “The Physiological Effects of Transcendental Meditation: A Proposed Fourth Major State of Consciousness,” Doctoral dissertation, reprinted in Orme-Johnson, D.W., ed., *Scientific Research on the Transcendental Meditation Program, Collected Papers*, Volume 1, (Bopart: Maharishi European Research University Press, second edition, 1977).

² Please refer to, for example, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Maharishi Vedic University Introduction*, (India: Maharishi Prakashan, 1995), pp. 58–59.

³ Wallace, “The Physiological Effects of Transcendental Meditation.”

⁴ *Scientific Research on the Transcendental Meditation Program, Collected Papers*, Volumes 1–6, (Bopart and Livingston Manor: Maharishi European Research University Press, 1975–2004).

⁵ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, “Transcendental Meditation: The Main Principle,” in *Bhagavad-Gita: A New Translation and Commentary with Sanskrit Text, Chapters 1–6*, (Los Angeles, International SRM Publications, 1967), p. 350.

⁶ *Pāṇinīya Śhikṣhā* 6–7. Translation based upon Maharishi’s videotaped lecture, “The Unbounded Scope of Maharishi’s Vedic Science,” (Vlodrop, Holland: MERU, January 14, 1991).

⁷ According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, alphabet means the letters of a given language, arranged in the order fixed by custom; or it may mean the basic or elementary principles of anything. In Sanskrit, every consonant has “A” as a part of it. The collection of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet is therefore actually a collection of syllables, fundamentally different from the Roman alphabet. The word is nevertheless convenient and appropriate for referring to the ordered collection of sounds and symbols fixed by the custom of the language.

⁸ Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in *Maharishi’s Weekly Global News Conference*, August 13, 2003.

⁹ Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Maharishi’s introductory remarks in *Maharishi’s Weekly Global News Conference*, October 8, 2003.

¹⁰ Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Maharishi’s Global News Conference*, December 3, 2003.

¹¹ Dillbeck, Michael, “World Peace Parliament” broadcast on the Maharishi Channel, August, 2004.

¹² The identification of the eight *Svara* as the foundation of the expression of all the vowels and consonants of the Vedic language is the first bold stroke in Maharishi’s program to articulate a comprehensive science of Vedic phonetics. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi attributes the cognition of a comprehensive phonetic science based on the eight *Svara* to Madhuchchhandas Vaiśhvamitra, the cognizer of the first *Sūktā* of Ṛik Veda.

Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in “Maharishi’s Global Family Chat,” January 17, 2006. Synthesizing the whole of Vedic speech in terms of eight fundamental syllables is neither transparent nor obvious. For example, the occurrence of the *Anusvara*, “Am̐,” in the list of *Svara* is surprising, because metrical patterns in Sanskrit recitation count it as a consonant. However, Ṛik Prātiśhākhyā allows that *Anusvara* may be either a *Svara* or *Vyañjana*. There is a traditional teaching that there are eight basic *Svara*, as evidenced, for example, by the existence of the Śhikṣhā text entitled *Svarāṣṭaka Śhikṣhā*, included in *Śhikṣhā Samgrahaḥ*. That text lists “A,” “I,” “U,” “Ṛ,” “Ḍi,” “E,” “AI,” “O,” and “AU,” and then says, *ityaṣṭau svarāḥ*, “These are the eight vowels.” (sic.) Further elaboration of Maharishi’s systematic revival of the Vedic science of phonology is found in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.

¹³ Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in *Maharishi’s Weekly Global News Conference*, October 29, 2003.

¹⁴ Taittirīya Prātiśhākhyā I:5.

¹⁵ *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 7.

¹⁶ *Ātreya Śhikṣhā*, verses 2.2-3.1.

¹⁷ *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 3.

¹⁸ The terminal “T” is used to mark an individual vowel, as distinct from others of the same *Varṇa*. Please refer to *Pāṇinī* I.1.70.

¹⁹ Ghosh, Manmohan, p. 51. *Pāṇinīya Śhikṣhā (Text and Translation)*, (Delhi, V.K. Publishing House, 1991), verse 4.

²⁰ According to the *Pañjikā* and *Prakāśha* commentaries on the *Pāṇinīya Śhikṣhā*, cited in Ghosh, p. 51.

²¹ *Vāsiṣṭhī Śhikṣhā*, belonging to Kṛiṣṇa Yajur-Veda, verse 2

²² As described in these Śhikṣhā texts. More elaborate expansions are possible, taking into account the three pitches.

²³ Please refer to below, Maharishi quotation from *Maharishi's Weekly Global News Conference*, January 15, 2003, Question 6.

²⁴ Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in *Maharishi's Weekly Global News Conference*, Jan. 15, 2003, Question 6.

²⁵ *Gautamī Śhikṣhā*.

²⁶ *Gautamī Śhikṣhā*, verse 1.

²⁷ *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 8; *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 4; and *Ātreya Śhikṣhā*, verses 3.2 and 4.1.

²⁸ *Aṣṭādhyāyi*, page 1.

²⁹ *Taittirīya Prātiśhākhyā*, Sūtra 7.

³⁰ *Gautamī Śhikṣhā* 1.

³¹ *Vāsiṣṭhī Śhikṣhā*, belonging to *Kṛiṣṇa Yajur-Veda*, verse 2.

³² *Āmareśhi Śhikṣhā*, verse 13.

³³ *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 9; *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 5; and *Ātreya Śhikṣhā*, verse 4.2.

³⁴ Tripāṭhī, Śrī Rāma Prasāda, *Śhikṣhā Saṁgrahaḥ*, (Varanasi, Sampurnand Sanskrit University, 1989)p. 27.

³⁵ *Aṣṭādhyāyi*, page 1.

³⁶ *Taittirīya Prātiśhākhyā*, Sūtra 8.

³⁷ *Gautamī Śhikṣhā* 1.

³⁸ *Yajñavalkya Śhikṣhā*, in Paṇaśīkara, Vāsudeva Lakṣmaṇa Śāstrī, *Śuklayajurveda-Saṁhitā (text and Padapāṭha)*, (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan, 1996), p. 827, column 2.

³⁹ *Aṣṭādhyāyi*, page 1.

-
- ⁴⁰ *Vāsiṣṭhī Śhikṣhā*, belonging to Kṛiṣṇa Yajur-Veda, verse 2.
- ⁴¹ *Ātreya Śhikṣhā*, verse 4.2, *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 5; and *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 9.
- ⁴² *Ātreya Śhikṣhā*, verse 5, *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 5; and *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 9.
- ⁴³ Taittiriya Prātiśhākhyā, *Sūtra* 9.
- ⁴⁴ Verma, V., *Rgveda-Prātiśhākhyā of Śaunaka along with Uvaṭabhāṣhyā*, (Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, 1986), 1:10, p. 53.
- ⁴⁵ *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 6; *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 2.
- ⁴⁶ *Āpishali Śhikṣhā*, verse 9; *Pāri Śhikṣhā*, verse 5.
- ⁴⁷ Aravind, L., “On the Vedic *Anusvāra*,” Geocities Webpage of L. Aravind, June 1, 2006, <<http://www.geocities.com/somasushma/anusvAra.html>>.
- ⁴⁸ Abhyankar, M.K.V., *A Dictionary of Sanskrit Grammar*, (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1986), p. 1.
- ⁴⁹ Abhyankar, p. 313.
- ⁵⁰ Author’s translation.
- ⁵¹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, “Unbounded Scope of Maharishi's Vedic Science,” videotaped lecture, January 14, 1991.
- ⁵² Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, “Study of the Veda is the study of consciousness, our own Self,” Lesson 5 in videotaped course, *Maharishi Vedic Science*, Maharishi Vedic University, 2001.
- ⁵³ “List of Vedic Accents,” *Omkananda Ashram Himalayas*, April 24, 2006, <<http://www.omkananda-ashram.org/Sanskrit/vedicaccents.htm>>. This page was previously given a more descriptive title, “Proposal to the Unicode Consortium for Additional Character Assignments to Accomodate Vedic texts.”
- ⁵⁴ Omkananda Ashram.
- ⁵⁵ Omkananda Ashram.

⁵⁶ Omkarananda Ashram.

⁵⁷ Omkarananda Ashram.

⁵⁸ Omkarananda Ashram.

⁵⁹ Omkarananda Ashram.

⁶⁰ Maharishi Open University, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in *Maharishi's Weekly Global News Conference*, Jan. 15, 2003.

⁶¹ Rīcho Akshare charts for Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Physiology show that all the theories of modern science have their basis in the collapse of the unbounded abstract all-possibilities structure onto its own point value. Please refer to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Celebrating Perfection in Education*, (1997), p. 52 ff.

⁶² *Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field: Integration of Modern Science and Ancient Vedic Science, Creating Unified Field-Based Perfect Civilization for all Mankind in this Scientific Age*, (Fairfield: Maharishi International University, 1984), pp. 16–25.

⁶³ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, (1994), pp. 106–107.

⁶⁴ This recommendation was made explicit by Maharishi in conversations about the reading with John and Sara Konhaus. Private e-mail communications 1998–2000.

VEDIC LITERATURE
READING CURRICULUM

Peter Franklin Freund

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School of Maharishi University of Management
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

July, 2006

Dissertation Supervisor: Professor Thomas Egenes

© 2006

Peter Franklin Freund

All Rights Reserved

Graduate School
Maharishi University of Management
Fairfield, Iowa

® Transcendental Meditation, TM-Sidhi, Maharishi Transcendental Meditation, Maharishi TM, Maharishi TM-Sidhi, Maharishi Vedic Science, Vedic Science, Consciousness-Based and Maharishi University of Management are registered or common law trademarks licensed to Maharishi Vedic Education Development Corporation and used with permission.