

## Appendix K

### On The Esoteric Meaning of the Seed Letters in Sanskrit:

The following explanation is largely gleaned from ‘The Chapter on the Matrix of Letters’ (Akṣara Mātrkā Vyākhyā, 釋字母品) from ‘The Ritual Manual on the Adamantine Crown of Engaged Meditation’ (Vajra Śekhara Yoga Tantra, 瑜伽金剛頂經) translated by Amoghavajra (不空) and ‘The Scripture on Repetitive Prayer’ (Japa Sūtram), a Hindu Tantric text by Pratyāgātānanda Saraswati. The latter is not a Buddhist text per se (it is primarily based on the Sāṃkhya and Vedānta schools of Yoga), but it does help provide a lucid explanation of the nature and the esoteric meaning of Sanskrit letters and syllables as they are employed in mantras such as AUM, HŪM, NAMAḤ, etc.

*The voice (vāk, 聲) is differentiated into strings of letters and syllables, forming necklaces (mālā, 瓔珞) & garlands (avatamṣa, 華嚴) of expression:*

The ‘original mother’ or matrix (mātrkā, 本母 or 摩呬理迦) of sounds from the voice is an organized system of stress (spandana, 動搖) that is formed into letters (varṇa, 文) & syllables (akṣara, 字). Each letter in the perfected language (Saṃskṛtam or Sanskrit, 梵語) is a uniquely operating matrix denoting a specific meaning of vital energy (prāṇa, 氣) through four aspects:

1. Content (vastu, 事) is the core of a letter, the letter as an essential starting point (bindu, 吽) of vital energy, comparable to the essential nature of a ball.
2. Power (śakti, 力) is the emanation (nāda, 吽) of vital energy coming from the core of the letter that potentially radiates in all directions. It is like a ball’s ability to generally impact the environment it is in.
3. Harmonization (chandaḥ, 和) is the functionality of the letter’s vital energy in its environment. As it interacts in its sphere of influence, definite lines or directions (aras, 方) first radiate and then unfold and evolve in various different phases (kalā, 時分) as it adapts to conditions. It is like a ball bouncing, rolling about, going this way or that. As it is played in the field it adapts to its surroundings in a unique theme or narrative.
4. Definition (ākṛti, 形) is the fully revealed pattern of the letter in the context of the greater sphere of which it is only a part. It is like a ball that has finished its play. With the game over, it has fulfilled its final purpose and reached its outer limit (nemi, 外邊) of potential.

Letters (varṇa, 文) are differentiated into vowels, consonants and finals:

- \* Vowels (svara, 韻) are the creative, unfolding and evolving exponents of vital energy (prāṇa, 氣). This can be likened to the processes of growing, budding, blooming and then withering.
- \* Consonants (vyañjana, 體文) are the materials worked with, like the parts of the flower itself.
- \* Finals (visarga, 止韻 & anusvāra, 隨韻) are the extremes of seed & fruit, unmanifest source & final manifestation.

The basic diagram is summarized by the three basic vowels, the first and last consonants, and the two finals:

- \* The three basic vowels of A, I & U express the essential power trigram of this vital energy.
- \* The first & last consonant summarize the fundamental unfolding of its manifestations as a magnet of vital energy.
  - \* Ka expresses its kinetic form as the most manifest expression of the interaction revealed in cause and effect.
  - \* Ha expresses its potential form as a store of this power in reserve.
- \* The two finals (AM & AH) represent the positive & negative poles of the magnet, the two extremes of compression into the infinitesimal point (bindu, 點) of potency & expansion into the infinite roar (nāda, 吽) of patency.

#### The Vowels

The vowels, or tones (svara, 韻) express the different power processes of vital energy. There are seven main vowels which, when factoring in long (dīrgha, 長) and short (hrasva, 短) expression, become fourteen vowels:

- \* First there are the three simple, homogeneous syllables (samānākṣara, 通字), A, I & U, the basic tones expressing the basic power trigram. These can be either long and short, and so they become six: A, Ā, I, Ī, & U, Ū.
- \* Next there are the two factors of acceleration and deceleration in the development of vital energy (ṚI & ḌI). Because they can also be long or short there are four of these factors (ṚI, ṚĪ, ḌI & ḌĪ).

And so with the six homogenous vowels attained through there being long and short tones and the four other vowels attained through there being acceleration and deceleration, there are a total of ten vowels.

- \* Lastly there are the two factors of combination (saṃdhi, 合音) in which the first basic vowel (A) is combined with the other two (A & I, A & U). These combinations either occur suddenly with a single tone quality (guṇa, 德) or gradually with an incremental transition (vṛddhi, 增) between the tones. Because of this, there are four factors of syllabic combination (saṃdhyā akṣara, 合字: E, AI, O, AU) and a grand total of fourteen vowels (svara, 韻).

*Each of the vowels has its own meaning in terms of the process of vital energy:*

A. *First there are the three homogeneous vowels or monophthongs* (samānākṣara, 通字) of A, I & U that can be short (hrasva, 短) or long (dīrgha, 長), making for a total of six. These express the essential nature of power in the vital energy of breath in its base form as well as its inward and outward forms of movement.

The first two are guttural (jihvāmūliya, 舌根 or kaṇṭha, 咽), across the throat and pharynx, expressing the base tone (tala, 平):

1. A, अ or 阿 is guttural and short as in anutpāda (不生), that which neither arises (nor perishes). It represents the universal locus or base, a base line in space and time allowing for potential movement, a seed placed in the ground that allows for the potential of growth.
2. Ā, आ or 阿(引) is guttural and long as in āraṇya (寂靜), the stillness of the forest, representing this base line encompassing its ultimate bounds or limit, filling its full range in the space/time continuum completely and then excessively.

The next two are palatal (tālavya, 腭音), across the palate, expressing the extension of breadth (lamba, 廣):

3. I, इ or 伊 is palatal and short as in indriya (根), capacity, representing the outward circumference of expansion (nāda, 吼) that leads to extensiveness, waves of divergent lines (aras, 方) that spiral outward, the germination, development and growth of seeds.
4. Ī, ई or 伊(引) is palatal and long as in iti (災禍), the calamity of excess, representing the outward wave of capacity that is spread out to its ultimate limit, showing its full range or extensiveness completely and then excessively.

The last two are labial (oṣṭha, 嘴唇), across the lips, expressing depth (vedha, 深):

5. U, उ or 塢 is labial and short as in upamā (譬喻), a specific example of a general principle, representing an inward line concentrating to a point (bindu, 吼) that leads to intensiveness, a nucleus of convergence in a sphere or system with a center (nābhi, 那鞞), a plant that has become a defined pattern with a central theme.
6. Ū, ऊ or 污(引) is labial and long as in ūna (損減), the intensiveness of demise or loss, representing an inward convergence on a navel, or center (nabhi, 那鞞) that is condensed to its ultimate limit, showing the extent of its intensiveness completely and then excessively.

B. *Next there are the combined vowels or diphthongs*, combinations (saṁdhi, 合音) of vowels expressing arousal (bodhanī, 驚覺) and tending towards realization of an end, or conclusion. They can be from guttural to palatal (E & AI) or from guttural to labial (O & AU), and are either short or long. Two (E & O) are short, with the two tones having a fully integrated quality, while the other two (AI & AU) are long, with the two tones being integrated more incrementally (vṛddhi, 增).

11. E, ऐ or 噯 transitions from guttural to palatal (kaṇṭhātālavya, 喉腭音) and is short & sudden as in eṣaṇā (求), aspiration. Aspiration sets one on a line to move forward; It may be towards a higher purpose or erratic and to no definite purpose. A seed releases the vital energy locked within it, making it grow.
12. AI, ऐ or 愛 also transitions from guttural to palatal but is long & gradual as in aiśvarya (自在), mastery. Here, the flow of aspiration reaches its full momentum and approaches its ultimate purpose. In growth towards self-discovery there is an evolving autonomy of development. Finding one's voice, one discovers one's source of power.
13. O, औ or 污 transitions from guttural to labial (kaṇṭhoṣṭhya, 喉唇音) and is short & sudden as in ogha (暴流), a flow that leads to a flood of abundance. This represents aspiration in a definite line or pattern with its own rhythm and flow, like a wave. In showing the way to a traveller along a definite path, one offers a set pattern, with lines (aras, 方) connected to a center (nābhi, 那鞞) that is in harmony with a central theme (chandaḥ, 和).
14. AU, औ or 奧 also transitions from guttural to labial but is long & gradual as in aupapāduka (化生), the spiritual transformation of life. This represents the total integration of the means and end of realization. Having finished growing it bears blossoms and fruits and then ultimately transcends all. With ultimate realization, one becomes what one has aspired to become. With full actualization of one's potential, there is complete culmination of the process that has been initiated.

C. *Last there are four letters expressing the factors of acceleration & deceleration* in the development of this vital energy of breath. This is a reference to its activity or inertia, swiftness or slowness, etc., which are inseparable aspects of each other. Their liquid articulation is lingual or dental, and they can be short or long:

7. Rī, ॠ or 哩 is lingual (mūrdhanya, 頭音) and short as in ṛddhi (神通), spiritual penetration. This represents tending towards the acceleration of motive force or spiritual fire

8. **Ṛī**, 𑖦 or 哩(引) is lingual and long as in **ṛī** (類例), the principle of the divine male. This represents floating, or bringing of power and influence of transformation to an extreme.
9. **ḷī**, 𑖧 or 𑖧 is dental (dantya, 齒音) and short as in **ḷī** (染), the mountain, or earth. This represents tending towards leavening of existence, or contentment with the status quo
10. **Ṛī**, 𑖦 or 𑖦 is dental and long as in **ṛī** (沈沒), the principle of the divine female. This represents sinking, bringing this contentment to an extreme.

**The Consonants and Finals** are the manifesters, the materials of vital energy that together serve as the magnet for the generator of sound. It is endowed with four components of expression (vyahṛti, 說):

- A. *The twenty-five basic consonants* (vyañjana, 體文) or contacts (sparśa, 觸) from Ka to Ma symbolize the earth below (bhuḥ, 地界). They are the substance of the magnet, its most defined, manifest expressions, evolved in different articulated phases (kalā, 時分). They are the kinetic aspect of vibration.
- B. *The four semi-vowels* (antaḥsthā, 中音) from Ya to Va standing between the consonants and vowels symbolize the atmosphere (bhuvaḥ, 幽界) between heaven & earth. They are the currents of the magnet's vital energy, reflections of its elemental principles that are not fully manifest.
- C. *The three sibilants* are the steam (soṣman, 有爇) and the *one aspirant* (prāṇa, 氣) is the heat. Together they are the great breaths (mahā prāṇa, 送氣音) that symbolize the heavens above (svaḥ, 天界).
  1. *The three sibilants* Śa, Ṣa & Sa are the lines of the force-field, radiating and dispersing channeled energy.
  2. *The one aspirant* H is the polarity of potential energy, the unmanifest background vibration of vital energy that is churned up, the reserve or potential from which the stress of vibration (spandana, 動搖) rises.

In terms of gender, vowels are considered feminine, consonants are considered masculine and the sibilants and aspirants are considered neutral.

- E. *The two finals*, the aftersound AM (anusvara, 隨韻) and the discharge AH (visarga, 止韻) are the poles of the magnet, the two extremes of positive and negative energy

#### A. *The Twenty-Five Basic Consonants*

The twenty-five basic consonants (vyañjana, 體文) express the most explicit manifestations of vital energy. They are also called contacts (sparśa, 觸) because the mouth organs must experience a certain measure of closure in order to pronounce them. These twenty-five building blocks are divided into five groups according to the mouth parts used and the five different means of channeling vital energy.

There are five groupings of basic consonants according to the parts of the mouth making contact and creating a closure of the air passage. Vital energy is analogous with breath while sound is analogous with consciousness.

- a. *Guttural* (jihvāmūliya, 舌根音 or kaṇṭha, 咽音) - Ka, Kha, Gha, Gh & Ṇa: These are sounds with a closure arising from the gut or throat, the most basic manifestations of breath. These represent the existential reality, the primordial arising of conditions that most directly and immediately cause the arising of sound.
- b. *Palatal* (tālavya, 腭音) - Ca, Cha, Ja, Jha & Ṇa: The breath is channeled and condensed by placing the flat of the tongue along the soft palate: These represent the channeling and condensing of sound into transient forms that are subject to arising and perishing.
- c. *Lingual, or cerebral* (mūrdhānya, 舌頂音) - Ṭa, Ṭha, Ḍa, Ḍha & Ṇa: The channeled and condensed flow of breath become focused by placing the tip of the tongue on the roof of the palate, carrying its vital energy out to levels of maximum intensity. Sound reaches a desired focus with the tip of the tongue on the roof of the palate, representing the arising and persistence of its own unique form of sound
- d. *Dental* (dantya, 牙齒音) - Ta, Tha, Da, Dha & Na: These focused flows of breath are segmented through placing the tip of the tongue on the teeth. With this partitioning of this focus, it is applied to different fields, representing the arising of a greater reality beyond any unique form of sound.
- e. *Labial* (oṣṭha, 唇音) - Pa, Pha, Ba, Bha & Ma: With the lips being employed as a check valve to start and stop the flow of breath, sound is stopped and started by closing and opening the lips, representing the arising of the transcendental meaning of the sound from its existential reality.

Each of the five groupings is endowed with five means of channeling this breath, depending on whether they are intoned, aspirated or nasal.

- \* *Whether they are #1 intoned* (ghoṣavant, 濁音) *or #2 toneless* (aghoṣavant, 清音) depends upon the degree to which the glottis is first closed and then open. Intonation increases the intensity of the breath's vital energy.
- \* *Whether they are #3 aspirated* (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) *or #4 unaspirated* (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) depends upon the degree to which they are followed by a rush of breath through the mouth. Aspiration increases the continuity in the current of the breath's vital energy.
- \* *In being #5 nasal* (anunāsika, 鼻音) they depend upon the breath being expelled through the nose instead of the mouth. Nasal expression increases the tendency to amass and store the breath's vital energy.

*These twenty-five basic consonants in five groupings are:*

- a. *The five guttural consonants* (jihvāmūliya, 舌根音 or kaṇṭha, 咽音), represent the existential nature, the primordial arising of conditions that directly and immediately cause the arousing of consciousness:
  1. **Ka**, क or 迦 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in kārya (作業), that which is due in the course of cause and effect; the right, appropriate action
  2. **Kha**, ख or 佉 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in kha (虛空), a cave, opening or void, that which penetrates the space/time continuum
  3. **Ga**, ग or 譏 (上) is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in gamana (行), that which goes forward or sets out a progressive flow of action
  4. **Gha**, घ or 伽 (去引) is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in ghana (一合), that which unites or combines to make everything complete, whole or solid
  5. **Ṇa**, ञ or 仰 (鼻呼) is nasal (anunāsika, 鼻音) as in aṅga, (支分), that which divides into different limbs and branches, diversifying into many individual directions
- b. *The five palatal consonants* (tālavya, 腭音), representing the continuity of existence, the channeling and condensing of consciousness into transient forms that are subject to arising and perishing
  6. **Ca**, च or 左 is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in cyuti (變遷), change, the process of impermanence that leads to demise, fall, death
  7. **Cha**, छ or 磋 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in chāyā (影像), reflections, shadows, the phantoms of all of that which is impermanent
  8. **Ja**, ज or 惹 is intoned (ghoṣa, 濁音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in jati (生), rebirth, genesis, creation of progeny, the producing of life in this world
  9. **Jha**, झ or 鄭 (去) is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in jhamala (戰敵), the battle for survival, the fight to overcome opposition and competition.
  10. **Ṇa**, ञ or 穰 (上) is nasal (anunāsika, 鼻音) as in jñāna (智), wisdom, the accumulation of knowledge
- c. *The five lingual, or cerebral consonants* (mūrdhānya, 舌頂音), representing the flow of the current of existence, the arising and persistence of consciousness that is self-interested
  11. **Ṭa**, ट or 吒 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in ṭaṅka (慢), a sword, axe or blade, representing pride, the cutting edge of self-interest.
  12. **Ṭha**, ठ or 咤 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in viṭhāpana (長養), a chief, elder, leader or higher authority; the prevailing interest.
  13. **Ḍa**, ढ or 擎 (上) is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in ḍamara (怨對), riot, tumult, disorder; the battling of different competing interests
  14. **Ḍha**, ढ or 荼 (去) is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in ḍhaṃka (執持), the persistence of attachment; maintaining, holding on in the face of adversity
  15. **Ṇa**, ण or 擎 (鼻呼) is nasal (anunāsika, 鼻音) as in raṇa (諍), courage in battle; fearlessly taking on a conflict, fight or debate with relish
- d. *The five dental consonants* (dantya, 牙齒音), representing the high tide of the flow, the arising of consciousness of a collective reality that goes beyond self-interest:
  16. **Ta**, त or 多 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in tathatā (如如), the transcendental nature that goes beyond any self-interest
  17. **Tha**, थ or 他 (上) is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in sthāna (住處), that which is established and firmly settled, unchangeable and fixed in place
  18. **Da**, द or 娜 is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in dāna (施), charity, generosity, sacrifice, offering up self-interest
  19. **Dha**, ध or 駄 (去) is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in dharma dhātu (法界), the universal or transcendental sphere of that is inclusive of all of life's purposes
  20. **Na**, न or 曩 is nasal (anunāsika, 鼻音) as in nāma (名), name, renown, reputation, identification. It is a reference to identity in the context of the greater collective reality
- e. *The five labial consonants* (oṣṭha, 唇音), representing the tendency to amass energy, for the arising of consciousness that identifies the transcendental meaning with the mundane reality:
  21. **Pa**, प or 跛 is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in paramārtha (第一義諦), the ultimate goal, the reality of the greatest meaning or significance
  22. **Pha**, फ or 頗 is toneless (aghoṣavanta, 清音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in phena (聚沫), the accumulation of spray, foam or dross; the fantasies or illusions about transcendental reality
  23. **Ba**, ब or 麼 is intoned (ghoṣavanta, 濁音) and unaspirated (alpaprāṇa, 不送氣音) as in bandhana (縛), attachment, bondage, fetters to that which is perceived to be transcendental reality



24. **Bha**, 𑖧 or 婆(去重) is intoned (ghoṣavant, 濁音) and aspirated (mahāprāṇa, 送氣音) as in bhava (有), existence, the existential reality of life and death that is before one
25. **Ma**, 𑖢 or 莽 is nasal (anunāsikam 鼻音) as in mama (吾我), 'me', the existential reality of one's own identity, one's personal soul

**B. The four semi-vowels** (antaḥsthā, 中音) stand between consonants and vowels. Here the mouth organs are in partial contact (īṣatspr̥ṣṭa sparśa, 近觸) and there is a liquid emulation of four of the five simple vowel tones.

1. **Ya**, 𑖥 or 野 expresses the elemental principle in the dispersion of wind (vayu, 風) as in yāna (乘), the vehicle dispersing and carrying the voice as quick as the wind. Ya emulates the palatal vowel I, the outward line of expansion (nāda) into extensiveness.
2. **Ra**, 𑖦 or 囉 expresses the elemental principle in the combustion of fire (agni, 火) as in rajas (塵染), the burning power of motive force that transforms all things into dust, smoke and ashes. Ra emulates the lingual vowel 𑖦I that tends towards the acceleration of transformation and renewal.
3. **La**, 𑖧 or 邏 expresses the elemental principle in the solidity of earth (pṛthivī, 地) as in lakṣaṇa (相), the different aspects or phases that appear and crystallize over time. La emulates the dental vowel 𑖧I that ends towards contentment with the existence of the status quo.
4. **Va**, 𑖨 or 嚩 expresses the elemental principle in the confluence of water (ap, 水) as in vākya (語言), the fluid medium of speech and language. Va emulates the labial vowel U, the inward line concentrating into a point (bindu) of intensity.

There is no fifth semi-vowel expressing empty space (ākāśa, 虛空) and emulating the guttural vowel A, the universal locus of space and time that encompasses the potential for the activity of the elements. The manifest expression of empty space will be expressed by the letter Ha. And so the four semi-vowels express the elemental principles that are reflections of vital energy.

**C. The four fricative consonants - three sibilants** (soṣman, 有媛) (Śa, Ṣa & Sa) **and one aspirant** (prāṇa, 氣) (Ha): These are characterized by a steady venting of breath with minimal or no restriction when coming through the mouth organs. The sibilants channel vital energy as in the release of steam (uṣman) while the aspirant channels it with only the release of heat (soṣman, 有媛). In the four semi-vowels there was no guttural expression. In these four there is no labial expression as there is no stoppage in the flow of vital energy:

1. **Śa**, 𑖑 or 捨 is the palatal sibilant as in śanti (本性寂), the bliss of freedom that is the original nature of peace, serenity and calm. This represents the essence of release in the flow of energy.
2. **Ṣa**, 𑖒 or 灑 is the lingual sibilant as in ṣaṇḍha or viṣāda (性鈍), the eunuch. This represents dissolution, the dulling of the sharpness of nature, the air coming out of the balloon leading to an inertia in the flow of vital energy that is without either purpose or the freedom of transcendence.
3. **Sa**, 𑖓 or 娑(上) is the dental sibilant as in satya (諦), truth, the essential nature of meaning and purpose in the flow of energy
4. **Ha**, 𑖔 or 賀 is the guttural aspirant as in hetu (因), the causal power, the motive force of vital energy arising from the gut and the heart. It represents the breath, the unbounded source of power.

**D. The two finals** (AM̐ & AH̐, respectively anusvāra, 隨韻 and visarga, 毘莎魯迦) are the end-points in the two extremes of duality, only appearing after a vowel. These final two letters are the poles of the magnet, the division of the sphere and the mediation (ardha mātṛā, 畔界) between its two extremes. Only through resolving the extremes of duality is there the dialectical principle of the middle way that turns sound into the light of meaning.

- \* **AM̐**, 𑖡 or 暗 is that which follows the tone or sound (anusvāra, 隨韻) as in anta (邊際), the edge or boundary, the extremity of closeness or nearness. It represents the point of existence and intensiveness (bindu). It is nasal and directed inward towards the brain, turning the sound into the light of meaning and purpose.
- \* **AH̐**, 𑖢 or 惡 is that which lets go (visarga, 毘莎魯迦) as in astaḥ gamana (遠離), the setting (sun) that represents the extremity of distance and detachment, the expanse of extensiveness (nāda). It is oral and directed outward, returning sound back into the unbound vital energy beyond oneself, freeing one from its wheel. By the rules of combining sounds (saṁdhi, 合音), in transliteration the final ḥ often becomes a final r prior to a consonant, as in 'Amitāyur Buddha'.

**The additional letter Kṣa**, 𑖛 or 乞灑(二合) is usually added as a conjunctive sounding (saṁyoga, 合音), representing a transition from the flow of cause & effect (Ka) to dissolution (Ṣa) as in the destruction of all things (kṣaya, 一切法盡) and their return to the void.