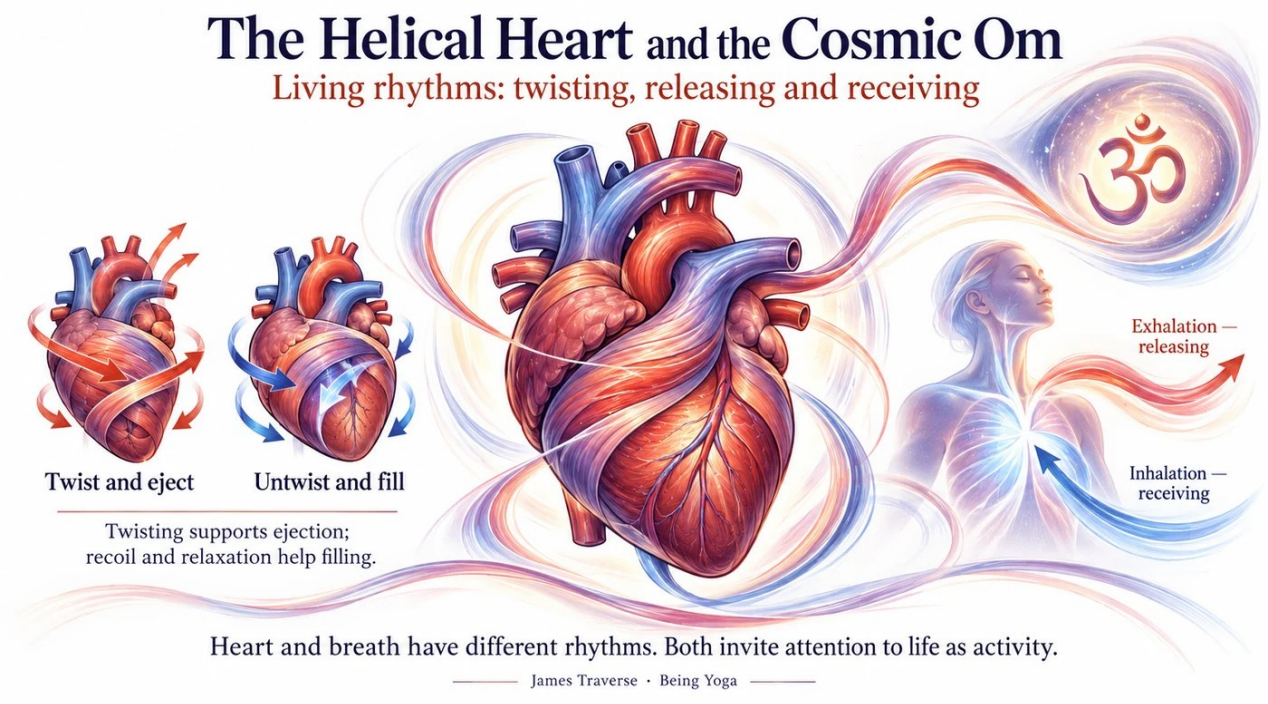
The Helical Heart and the Cosmic Om

James Traverse | Being Yoga

Updated reading edition - 19 October 2026



Living rhythms: twisting, releasing and receiving

“Heart” and “breath” are useful names. Knowing via Being invites us to encounter the activity they name.

This reading edition follows the updated online article, bringing cardiac movement into conversation with Om and self-inquiry.

Read the current article at beingyoga.com

A Synthesis of Biological Form and Universal Vibration

1. Introduction: Living Form and Universal Vibration

A spiral invites attention to movement. We encounter spirals and helices in many natural forms, including aspects of the heart's muscular architecture. In my teaching, these forms offer a way to contemplate **Prana**: life encountered as activity, relationship and flow.

The heart is a muscular pump, yet the word "pump" alone can leave us with too simple a picture. Its action includes contraction, twisting, relaxation and recoil. Looking more closely, we encounter a living movement rather than a static object.

Here I bring this movement into conversation with **Om** and self-inquiry. The anatomy provides a starting point; the connection with Om is a teaching lens through which to explore the relationship between the human appearance and the whole.

2. Helical Architecture and the Myocardial-Band Model

Francisco Torrent-Guasp proposed the **helical ventricular myocardial band** as a model for understanding the heart's muscular organization. His dissections unfolded ventricular muscle into a band with basal and apical loops, offering an influential way of relating form to movement.

The interpretation of the heart as one discrete muscular band remains debated. Other anatomical work describes an interconnected, branching three-dimensional mesh of muscle cells. Helical organization does not require us to treat the entire heart as a single rope or assign all its fibers one fixed crossing angle. See Agger and Stephenson's account of myocardial architecture and its controversies [1].

What matters for the inquiry here is the relationship between form and activity. The arrangement of muscle supports a coordinated movement: the heart narrows, shortens, twists, relaxes and recoils as blood is ejected and the chambers fill.

3. The Cardiac Dance: Twisting and Untwisting

During contraction, the left ventricle twists as well as shortens, contributing to blood ejection. Relaxation and untwisting help lower ventricular pressure and support early filling. Blood moves along pressure differences; suction and pressure are related aspects of this process, rather than competing explanations.

Filling also depends on the heart's relaxation, chamber properties and atrial contribution. Their relative contributions vary with circumstances. A single percentage cannot describe every heartbeat or every heart. This study of ventricular twist before and after aortic-valve replacement [2] explores how twisting and untwisting relate to cardiac function.

I use **“twist-and-suck”** as a vivid phrase for this movement of ejection and receiving. It directs attention toward the heart as activity. The invitation is to feel the living rhythm that the noun “heart” names.

Heart and breath: releasing and receiving

The heart’s twisting supports blood ejection; its untwisting contributes to filling. Breathing offers a corresponding movement: exhalation releases, inhalation receives. Their rhythms differ - several heartbeats ordinarily occur within one breath - yet both invite attention to life as ongoing activity.

In my teaching, this becomes an embodied illustration of releasing and allowing. We can feel these movements without making them achievements of a separate doer. Heartbeat and breathing happen within a living relationship with the whole.

“Heart” and “breath” are useful names. Knowing via Being invites us to encounter the activity they name.

For the cardiac mechanics, see this review of ventricular twisting and untwisting [3]. The connection with releasing, allowing and Knowing via Being is my contemplative interpretation.

4. The Metaphysical Architecture of Om (Aum)

The sacred symbol **Om** is a sonic and geometric map of non-dual reality. It tracks the movement of Prana from unmanifest potential into the extensions of space and time. This synthesis is realized through the **Vaisvanara Vidya** (Universal Body meditation), where the individual identifies their own anatomy with the cosmic elements.

1. **The Sound "A" (A) - The Large Lower Curve:** Represents the **Waking State** (Vaisvanara) and the physical world. Here, Prana appears as **Extension (Space)** and is experienced through **Feeling**. Just as "A" is the first sound of the alphabet, space is the first outward thrust of the Flow.

2. **The Sound "U" (U) - The Middle Side Curve:** Represents the **Dreaming State** (Taijasa) and the subtle mental world. Prana manifests as **Sequence (Time)**, navigated by **Thought**. This is the flow narrating itself, creating the illusion of duration.

3. **The Sound "M" (M) - The Upper Curve:** Represents **Deep Sleep** (Prajna) and the **Causal State**. It is the stage of **Dissolution**, where individual "whirlpools" of identity are absorbed back into the undifferentiated current.

4. **The Crescent (Maya):** Represents the illusion that space and time are separate containers rather than movements of the singular Flow.

5. **The Silence (Turiya) - The Dot (Bindu):** The absolute ground of being. The **Bindu** is the "Timeless Now," the singularity of Pure Consciousness from which all rhythms arise.

5. Integration: "Om Written in Flesh"

The human body is a localized whirlpool in the river of Prana, where the biological rhythms of breath and blood act as "verbs" mirroring the A-U-M structure.

• **Inhalation (A):** As the body expands, internal space arises. This is the biological manifestation of **Space/Extension**, where the "Inner River" of blood flow defines our internal spatial landscape.

• **The Pause (U):** Presence gathers and the flow is momentarily held. This suspension mirrors the gathering of **Time/Thought**, where the Pranic current enables the sequential processing of the mind.

• **Exhalation (M):** The contraction and return of the individual "whirlpool" of breath to the "river" of the atmosphere represents **Dissolution**.

• **The Heartbeat (Bindu):** The pulse is the physical manifestation of the **"Now"** - the non-linear arrival of existence that persists regardless of the mental narrative of time. In this teaching lens, the heart's pumping is encountered as part of the living whole, rather than the achievement of an isolated object.

6. Development: Form Emerging through Movement

The developing heart begins with a tubular organization and undergoes looping, chamber formation and further differentiation. These processes show how living form emerges through coordinated growth and movement. Cardiac Morphogenesis: Specification of the Four-Chambered Heart [4] describes this development in detail.

This is not a literal replay of a billion years of evolution in fifty days, nor does a human embryo pass through a sequence of adult worm, fish and amphibian hearts. Shared developmental features across species are part of an evolutionary relationship, rather than miniature versions of those animals.

For our contemplation, the significant point is simple: form is not separate from its forming. The heart's development and its continuing activity invite us to look beyond the impression of a finished, self-contained thing.

huMAN, atMAN, brahMAN: three names, not three realities

The repeated MAN is a visual teaching device used here, rather than a claim that these words share the same linguistic origin.

We call ourselves human beings. Yet a human life is happening: breathing, feeling, thinking, listening and responding. We mistake verbs for nouns when we take this living appearance to be a separate, fixed thing.

The heart offers an embodied doorway into this inquiry. We often treat nouns as verbs, yet regarding the heart, it is more that we treat a verb as a noun. “Heart” names a recognizable form, yet that form is inseparable from its living activity and relationships. Its spiral movement becomes, in my teaching, an image through which to contemplate the relationship between apparent individuality and the whole.

huMAN names the human appearance - the particular life, with its body, history and relationships.

atMAN turns the inquiry toward the Self: what is immediately present as the knowing of this life. The human viewpoint is particular; this does not make the Self a fragment of consciousness confined within the body.

brahMAN names limitless reality, Source by whatever name. Brahman is not elsewhere while human life appears. Atman is Brahman.

These are not three substances. Nor does the human need to become Atman and then grow into Brahman. The naming allows different perspectives to be spoken about; recognition concerns their nonseparation.

A whirlpool has a location and a recognizable movement, yet it introduces no water apart from the river. Similarly, the apparent individuality of a human life does not establish an existence apart from Source.

The heart’s movement illustrates this inquiry; it does not anatomically prove the identity of Atman and Brahman. Nor does recognizing life as activity mean reducing the Self to a changing biological process.

The error is to take an appearance as independently existing, then mistake that apparent separation for what we are. **It is the nature of an error to cease once seen.** What ceases is the mistaken understanding. Human life continues - with greater room for listening, care and participation.

For the Vedantic context, read Aparokshanubhuti: Direct Self-Realization through Knowing via Being [5]. Explore the core teaching about verbs and nouns [6] on the About page.

This is whole; That is whole

The invocation accompanying the Isha Upanishad points toward wholeness: That is whole; this is whole. The appearance of the whole does not diminish its fullness. Read Swami Krishnananda’s commentary on the invocation [7] for its Vedantic context.

Dahara Vidya approaches this through the apparently small space within the heart. What seems inward and bounded opens into the limitless. The heart becomes a doorway into inquiry, rather than a container that confines Brahman. The Chandogya Upanishad 8.1.1 [8] introduces the lotus-like abode, and 8.1.3 [9] speaks of the vastness of the space within the heart.

In my teaching, huMAN, atMAN and brahMAN offer different ways of approaching this recognition. The human appearance does not introduce an existence apart from Source. Atman is Brahman.

Manas - the activity of mind - names and distinguishes. These distinctions are useful, yet we can mistake them for divisions in reality. We mistake verbs for nouns, then take the named appearance to be independently existing.

The whirlpool does not subtract water from the river by appearing. Nor does its dissolution restore water that was missing. Its apparent individuality never established separation.

Knowing via Being is the recognition of this wholeness in the midst of living - not the achievement of completeness by a separate, incomplete self.

Switchover: movement and recognition

Breathing makes switchover tangible: inhalation gives way to exhalation, and exhalation to inhalation. In the heart, ejection gives way to filling. These are distinct rhythms, yet each reveals a living alternation of activity.

In my teaching, the eight limbs of yoga offer another way to explore switchover: from outward engagement toward inward attention, and from effort toward absorption. The limbs support one another; this is a contemplative reading of their relationship, rather than a claim that they form a single physiological cycle.

In self-inquiry, switchover is the moment of insight in which the error of misidentification is seen. Self-realization is the removal of that error and abiding as what has always been the case: Atman is Brahman. Nothing new is created or acquired. What changes is the understanding of 'I.'

As I put it: **"It is the nature of an error to cease once seen."**

7. Conclusion: From Noun to Verb

Bringing the heart's activity into conversation with Vedic teaching invites a shift in perspective. A human being is not a "noun" - a static, fixed object - but a **"verb"**, a continuous, dynamic flow of Prana.

In my teaching, the helical heart is an embodied illustration of this cosmic vibration. It is "Om written in flesh," a localized expression of the universal current that demonstrates there is no "inside" or "outside," only a singular, pulsing reality. By understanding the heart's twist-and-suck rhythm as the biological echo of the eternal A-U-M, we recognize that our internal pulse is a direct participation in the aware stillness of the universe. We do not *have* a heartbeat; we *are* the pulsing of the Timeless Now.

Sources and further reading

1. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7711767/

2. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10156174/

3. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3079077/

4. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7528854/

5. https://beingyoga.com/aparokshanubhuti-direct-self-realization/

6. https://beingyoga.com/about/#verbs-not-nouns

7. https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/isavasya/isavasya_invoc.html

8. https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/chandogya-upanishad-english/d/doc239414.html

9. https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/chandogya-upanishad-english/d/doc239416.html

Related teaching: Flow in Form - the Universal Matrix