

The Sanskrit word Ojas (pronounced with a hard j, as in juice) means life force, vitality, vigor, energy. In the philosophy of Yoga, the term refers to the force that connects the mind to the body and consciousness. The observant self, with all its emotions, sensations and cognitions, is what we have come to think of as mind. But how non-material mind can arise from biological functions is a problem that science and philosophy have struggled with for centuries. No definitive answers have yet been found.

Chanting starts for me as a process of inquiry into this mystery. Repeating mantras, I use the breath in my my body as a means of looking into the nature of my mind, and ultimately, my consciousness. The repetitive rhythmic and melodic stimulation drives my limbic and autonomic nervous systems, altering the way my brain thinks, feels and interprets reality. It seems to particularly affect how my brain defines the limits of my sense of self. As I continue to chant, the connections between body, mind and consciousness become joyously and serenely evident.

Most of the time, singing just makes me feel better, transforming anxiety, anger and a sense of separation into an experience of well-being. But when I'm able to deeply sustain the practice, my mind just stops, and I drop into a state that defies all description or explanation. It's a state of pure awareness, a clear and vivid consciousness of no-thing and every-thing as a unified whole. This state transcends all limits and comparisons. I'm simultaneously empty and full, ecstatic and still, and since this state is beyond words, all my questions end.

Humans love to engage in activities such as music, dancing, and lovemaking, or any intense, sustained activity which produces the experience of being swept away, or deeply absorbed. If we have the opportunity, we seek these experiences above all others. When asked to recall the most important experiences in our life, we always point to the occasions when we felt this way. Our brains are wired to pursue these experiences because the connection we feel in these unitary moments strengthens our bonds to each other.

When I chant, my mind gets out of its own way, and I sometimes experience a pure awareness beyond the limits of subject and object. Where matter and energy and mind are all the same. A universe where all is one.

Dave Stringer