

Japa Meditation

Mantras

Sound is a form of energy made up of vibrations or wavelengths. Certain wavelengths have the power to heal, others are capable of shattering glass. *Mantras* are Sanskrit syllables, words or phrase which, when repeated in meditation, will bring the individual to a higher state of consciousness.

Generally there are six qualities common to most *mantras*:

1. It was originally revealed to and handed on by a sage who attained self-realisation through it;
2. It has a certain metre or rhythm;
3. It has a presiding deity;
4. It has a “bija” or seed at its essence which invests it with special power;
5. It has divine cosmic energy or shakti; and lastly
6. It has a key which must be unlocked through constant repetition before pure consciousness is revealed.

Japa or *mantra* repetition not only provides a tangible point on which to focus the mind – it also releases the energy encased in that sound. Through *japa*, the energy literally manifests itself in a powerful way to change patterns of thought.

A *mantra* is a means to alter negative patterns and enhance the positive. By holding the mind on a *mantra* and by contemplating the aspects of the Divine associated with it, it is possible to be completely transformed. This process of developing one-pointedness can be again compared with practices of *dharana* (focus), *dhyana* (meditation) and ultimately *samadhi* (transcendence) in *raja yoga*. Although the process in *Bhakti yoga* is more colourfully dressed, and the emotions more engaged, a similar progression is able to take place.

OM Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya is a twelve syllable *mantra* which has, according to the Vedic scriptures, enabled aspirants to attain realization of the Divine or *samadhi*.

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In the practice of *Japa Yoga*, a *mala* is used to assist in counting the repetitions of the name of a Divine aspect such as Visnu, Siva or Divine Mother. A *mala* is a string of 108 beads, usually made of sandalwood, Tulasi, neem or rudraksha seeds.

As you chant, observe the mind. You may be shocked at how easily the mind can be sidetracked and how quickly you get bored.

The mind is constantly moving, using energy unproductively because the “mental background noises” mostly concern past or future events. Life is a chain of cause and effect. The beads of the *mala* are also an endless chain and the endless thoughts are now given with each bead a specified, significant meaning relating to the particular *Mantra*. There is a special bead called Mount Meru or Godhead bead where the *mala* is tied together. When the fingers reach this bead, the *mala* should be turned and the movement continued the other way. This bead symbolizes God-realization and each time you reach it you have a reminder that you do not have to continue the chain of cause and effect. Another reminder is given in holding the *mala* at heart level, signifying the devotional aspect of this practice, the attempt to transcend the lower levels of being.

The use of a *mala* gives the body some activity and thereby releases nervous energy or restlessness. The beads are moved between the middle finger and the thumb, never the first (index) finger and thumb, as the *Mantra* is repeated with each bead. Through use of the beads they take on some of the energy of the user and they become spiritualized. The *mala* made from the Tulasi or neem tree, can be a little rough at first, but the beads become smooth from the practice. Especially for a busy Western person the practice of the *mala* has therapeutic value because of its benefit of concentrating the mind, directing the emotions and focusing the body.

To get the greatest benefit from your *Mantra* practice, set a definite period of time aside each day and make a written commitment to yourself to continue the practice for a sufficient length of time that you can feel its effects. Three months is a good beginning. Begin small and build up – this develops enthusiasm and perseverance to handle greater things. Do not be over-ambitious, letting the ego convince you that you will be able to sustain a long period of chanting immediately.

The recommended time for *Mantra* practice is four o'clock in the morning because at that hour there are few troubling vibrations in the air. However, this may be difficult unless you are living in an Ashram or by yourself. As you become accustomed to the idea, increase the time of practice. You will become very conscious of time, how you spend it and how, perhaps, you waste it. Make a practice of writing down everything that you do. See where you waste time and learn to be efficient so that you can find the time you want for spiritual practice.

Before beginning to chant make sure that not only the large muscles of your body are relaxed, and the neck and shoulders, but also the muscles of the tongue, jaw, forehead and eyes.