

The Characteristics of a Mantra

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The mantra is like a rocket engine that propels the mind beyond the "gravitational fields" of the lower levels of consciousness, through all the turbulence of the subconscious mind, to the superconscious - and beyond. Thus, a correct process of meditation involves the generation of immense psychic energy through intense concentration on the mantra.

Some systems of meditation which involve internal repetition of certain sounds, advise the meditators not to concentrate on them. Such techniques are quite relaxing and refreshing, but for spiritual elevation, concentration is essential - the intense effort to focus the mind on the mantra and its meaning. Like the chemist concentrated on his research, or the medium concentrated on her crystal ball - the fixed attention of the mind on any object' or ideation of thought will produce the necessary internal energy to elevate the mind to subtler levels. Experiments on Ananda Marga meditators whose process begins with concentration have shown that, rather than being asleep or passively relaxed, their bodies and minds are in a state of intense physiological activation: more energy, rather than less, is flowing through them.

THREE QUALITIES OF A MANTRA:

What is the special effect of the mantra, that by focusing the mind on it, one can transcend the ignorance and illusions of the lower mind?

A mantra must have three qualities to hold the restless mind steady, to energise it, and to transport it to subtler realms. It must be pulsative, incantative and ideative.

FIRST QUALITY OF A MANTRA: PULSATIVE

First, it must be pulsative. It must be of two syllables if it is an internal mantra so that it can flow rhythmically with the breathing, for the breathing has a profound effect upon the state of one's consciousness. You may have noticed that whenever you are angry or upset, your breathing is fast and short; but when you are absorbed in any task, you naturally breathe slowly and deeply.



The functioning of breathing is closely associated with the flow of vital energy in the body, called prana (in Sanskrit), which in turn greatly affects the mind. If the breathing is fast and irregular, the prana or vital energy becomes unsteady and agitated; the mind becomes disturbed and perception and thinking are unclear. Thus control of breathing (or pranayama) is an important part of yoga training. The more the breathing is slowed and regulated, the greater the composure in the prana (vital energy), and the greater the concentration and control of the mind.

Once there was a minister who had greatly displeased his king. As punishment, the king ordered him imprisoned in the top of a very high tower, and the minister was left there to perish. That night, the minister's faithful wife came to the tower, crying, to see if there was any way she could help him escape. He told her to return to the tower the following night, bringing with her a long rope, some string, some silken thread, a beetle, and a pot of honey. Wondering at this strange command, the wife did as he wished, and the next night brought him the desired articles. The minister directed her to tie the silken thread firmly around the beetle's leg, then to smear its feelers with a drop of honey and place it on the tower wall, with its head pointing upward. Attracted by the scent of the honey, the beetle crawled slowly up the wall, drawing the silken thread behind it. Hours later, it reached the top, and the minister caught it and untied the silken thread. Then he told his wife to tie the other end of the thread, dangling on the ground, to the long string. The minister then pulled up the thread until he could grasp the end of the string. Next he instructed her to tie the rope to the other end of the string, and pulling up the string, he grabbed the rope and tied it to the tower window - and slid down to freedom.

The silken thread is the motion of breathing, the string is the prana or vital energy, and the rope is the mind. By controlling the motion of breathing, we can gain control over the prana (vital energy); by controlling the prana, we can control the mind. Then we attain liberation from all bondages.

Thus the mantra must be of two syllables so that its slow and rhythmic internal chanting will serve to slow the breathing, steady the prana, and calm and control the restless wandering of the mind.

SECOND QUALITY OF A MANTRA: INCANTATIVE

The second quality is incantative. The mantra must have a certain sound, a certain vibrational pattern so that when it is chanted internally, it will elevate the individual's own vibration, or "entitative rhythm".

Each entity of this creation has its own particular entitative rhythm, its own note in the universal harmony. From pulsing quasars to oscillating electrons - from the ultrasonic melody of mountain ranges to the ceaseless reverberation of the creatures, singing and drumming, whirring and clicking, laughing and crying - all the notes are orchestrated in a vast cosmic concert.

The source of this ceaseless rhythmic movement is the Infinite Consciousness, soundless and still, the ocean of peace. Undisturbed by any vibration, it flows in an infinite 'straight line' through eternity.

The ancient sages, who had merged their minds in this sea of unexpressed Consciousness, realised that the universe is a vibrational play of varied waves with different wavelengths. By their intuitional powers, they came to understand the laws of universal harmonics governing this vibrational flow, and they developed a subtle science of sound to affect the rhythms of creation - without any mechanical apparatus. Just as a person singing in higher octaves can affect physical things, such as glass.

Indian music, developed by the great yoga master, Shiva, over seven thousand years ago, was one branch of that science. The classical ra'gas, or musical scales, are so subtly attuned to the rhythms of nature that each raga is to be played or sung in a certain season and at a certain time of the day, to produce a specific emotional effect in the musician and audience. One raga is played only at dawn in the spring, to evoke the mood of universal love, another is sung only during the evening in summer, to arouse compassion; still another only during midday in the rainy season, to summon courage.

It is said that the masters of music had control over not only human emotions, but natural manifestations as well. Historical documents describe the remarkable powers possessed by Tansen, the 16th Century court musician of Akbar the Great. Commanded by the Emperor to sing a night raga while the sun was overhead, Tansen's vibrational song instantly caused the whole palace to become enveloped in darkness.

But the subtlest of all these sciences of sound is the science of mantra. The yoga masters know that each individual's entitative rhythm vibrates at a particular frequency. Like many instruments in a symphony playing in harmony, the combination of all the various "bio-rhythms" of mind and body (psychic waves, heart-beat, metabolic rate, etc) produces the individual's particular "melody". If this individual melody is raised to subtler and slower frequencies, it ultimately becomes infinite - and the mind merges in boundless Cosmic Consciousness.

Through long inner experimentation, the yogis developed a series of powerful sounds or mantras which, when chanted internally, resonate with the individual's entitative rhythm and gradually transform it into the infinite 'straight line' of Supreme Peace.

These sounds originate from inside our own bodies, and were systematised into the oldest alphabet and language on earth - Sanskrit.

SANSKRIT: THE HUMAN BODY'S ETERNAL SONG

Close your eyes for a moment and just listen.

What did you hear? Even when we are in a "quiet" environment, so many sounds bombard our ears : the dull drone of machines, distant voices carried on the wind, birdsongs, telephones, construction noises, traffic it seems impossible to escape external noise in this modern world.

But if we can withdraw our minds from these external sounds, we will hear much subtler, inner vibrations. In the absolute stillness of soundproof chambers in scientific laboratories, insulated from all external noise, some people have been able to hear some of these internal sounds: a high-pitched resonance, and a deep throbbing of the vibrations of their own nervous system, and the pulsing of their blood.

Thousands of years ago, yogis meditating in the utter silence of caves or mountains, were able to withdraw their minds not only from external sounds, but from the noises of the physical body as well. They could then focus their minds on centres of subtle energy inside them. Along the spine and in the brain, there are seven psychic energy centres or chakras which control the functioning of mind and body. Most human beings are unaware of these chakras or energy centres (plexii), but when the mind and body become more refined through meditation, these subtle energy centres can be perceived and controlled.

The chakras or psychic energy centres have been described by enlightened saints and mystics of all spiritual paths and cultures - by Buddhists, ancient Chinese, Hindus, Tantriks, Christian and Jewish mystics, Sufis, and Native American Indians. Recently, science has detected them as well. Sensitive instruments have measured energy emanations (beyond frequencies which are known to come from biochemical, anatomic systems), surging from the surface of the body at the exact locations of the chakras. After all this whole universe is but manifestations of various frequencies of vibrations - and that includes everything to do with the human body and mind.

Those ancient yogis who directed their inner ear toward these energy centres, were able to hear the subtle vibrations emanating from each of them - 49 different vibrations in all and another 1 representing spiritual knowing. Then they spoke them aloud, and each of these subtle inner sounds became one letter of the Sanskrit alphabet. Hence, Sanskrit is a language but never a popular spoken language.

Thus, the Sanskrit language - sometimes called "the mother of all languages" - was developed from the externalised sounds of our subtle internal energies. It is the human body's eternal song.

MANTRA TRANSFORMS THE ENTITATIVE RHYTHM

The yogis then combined these powerful sounds into mantras which are attuned to the universal rhythms of the cosmos. For thousands of years, these mantras were never written down, lest they be misused by unworthy power-seekers, but were passed down directly from guru to disciple. Even today, they must be learned personally from a qualified teacher of Ananda Marga; for different individuals, with different entitative rhythms, will

receive different mantras for concentration. Thus, people of all nationalities, regardless of their language, will use Sanskrit mantras for meditation, because Sanskrit is the universal language for self-realisation. It is not possible to learn spiritual meditation from a book because a book cannot tell you how your vibration must be tuned to the mantra suitable for your entitative rhythm - this can only be done through practical application of yogic science.

The repeated chanting of the subtle inner music of the mantra (the "incantative rhythm") in meditation vibrates the chakras (psychic energy centres) and stills the restlessness of the mind.

Gradually, the meditator's entitative rhythm slows down in resonance with the mantra.

Finally, it is transformed into the straight line cosmic rhythm of infinite wavelength, and merges into the eternally still and serene sea of Cosmic Consciousness, the goal of all yoga practice.

THIRD QUALITY OF A MANTRA: IDEATIVE

The mantra is not only a vibratory, pulsating sound that harmonises all the rhythms of the mind and body with the Supreme Rhythm, it has a specific expansive meaning as well.

Yogis have taught for centuries the simple truth : "As you think, so you become." It is now an accepted psychological fact that the mind becomes like its object of ideation. Many experiments have shown that our consciousness tends to merge or identify with any focus of attention that is maintained for a sufficient period. Thus visualisations and affirmations will gradually transform our minds according to their object of concentration.

Understanding that people are often limited by the negative or inferior ideas they have of themselves, psychologists attempt to change our "self-image" and thus to completely transform our personality. In one experiment, a man - sweating and straining as hard as he could - could only lift 150 kg of weight. Then he was hypnotised, and the hypnotist repeated, "You are the strongest man in the world, you have tremendous strength!" Under hypnosis, he lifted 200 kg without the slightest strain or difficulty.

Today, the "power of positive thinking," positive affirmations and creative visualisations are being used by many people all over the world to become more successful, more popular, more wealthy. But the goal of yoga is not so narrow or limited as worldly success or wealth. These are all relative and can disappear at any moment. The goal of yoga is nothing less than infinity - the infinite expansion of one's mind to merge with the Supreme Consciousness. That is the actual meaning of the word 'yoga' (pronounced 'joga').

Thus, the process of meditation also employs a repeated affirmation - the meaning of the mantra "I am Infinite Consciousness" - "I am one with That." Actually, this is the reality - on the highest levels of our being, we are infinite (our beings are physical, mental and spiritual) and we always have been; we only do not realise it because we identify with our small egos, with the limited lower levels of our minds. However, there is nothing preventing us from identifying with our higher self - nothing at all. The only thing that is needed is a practical, daily and useful method and our will and sincerity to do so. Yoga (and mantra) is that scientific method.

So by daily practice, by the constant ideation, "I am That", we gradually lessen our false identification with our body and lower mind, and identify with the blissful Self within. As the mind gradually, imperceptibly expands through higher and higher layers, one glorious day we become completely free from all the bondages of ego and realise that we are not this body, we are not this mind, we are not this imperfect personality - we are more than this - we are infinite. Obviously, when we concentrate deeply on something, eg studying we already loose some identification with our lower self and absorb ourselves in more subtler psychic or mental vibrations. We can identify even deeper than this - to the root of our very own consciousness which is fundamentally the same as the Infinite Consciousness. We are the Supreme Consciousness. In that moment, we go beyond the mantra - beyond pulsation, beyond vibration or incantation, beyond ideation - and in breathless silence, we dissolve into ecstatic union with the origin of all.



Sooner or later, we will all experience it - it is the birthright of every human being. Each person is a channel for infinite consciousness and energy and knowledge - a vessel to be filled with this never-ending bliss. The revelations of dreams, hypnosis, hallucinations, creative flashes, and intuitional foresight of great people in the world have given us some idea of the limitless resources of our inner spaces. Now we must check the external drift of our minds and turn our awareness in upon itself so we can explore the Light within.

"The Supreme Consciousness is inside you like butter in milk; churn your mind through meditation and the Infinite will appear - you will see that the resplendence of the Supreme Consciousness illumines your whole inner being. The Infinite Consciousness is like a subterranean river in you. Remove the sands of mind and you will find the clear, cool waters within."

--Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

The mantra (pronounced mahn-trah) makes use of sound to harmonise the rhythm of the body (eg through breathing in a regular pattern) and to focus the mind towards the higher Self. It works using subtle syllables associated with spiritual propensities of the mind and its psychic energy centres in the body. Traditionally, practitioners receive their own mantra from their teacher in the context of a formal initiation. It can be repeated as often as possible (eg you can virtually meditate on the bus) and is kept internally as a spiritual asset for their own use.

A universal mantra – **BABA NAM KEVALAM** - can be used any time, and your personal mantra is just for your own silent meditation and practice.

