

Mantra and Meditation

What is Mantra?

The repetitive chanting of *mantras* (specific sounds or phrases) is an ancient practice found in a variety of cultures. The ancient Vedic seers combined mantra with meditation as a potent way to connect with the Divine in a state of self-transcendence. The word mantra comes from ‘*man*’ meaning ‘*mind*’ and ‘*tra*’ meaning ‘*protection*’ or ‘*instrument*’. In this way, mantras can help us to escape from the traps that our minds can often set for us.

When sounds are repeated in a rhythmical way, they can create a resonance that acts as a form of divine expression, untouched by thought. In an individual, repeated chanting of a simple mantra can help us to organize our thoughts and emotions. When this is practiced in a group setting, we are engaging in *Kirtan*, a call-and-response singing usually led by practitioners of *Bhakti Yoga*. Modern research has determined there is considerable power to chanting or singing in community; many find this deepens their spiritual connection with the Divine and with each other.

The rhythm of mantras work on the subconscious level; it is not necessary for us to understand or intellectualize about the meaning of the mantra for the sound to have an effect on us. Some believe it is part of the magic of the mantra that we don’t think about the meaning as this takes the mind into a non-meditative state. Others believe that ascribing meaning to a particular sound or phrase, like in the practice of positive affirmations (eg., “I am love”) helps to infuse that meaning into our consciousness.

The most revered mantra in Hinduism is the ***Gayatri Mantra*** (from the sacred text, the ***Rig Veda***).

*Om bhur bhuvah svah
Tat savitur varenyam
Bhargo devasya dhimahi
Dhiyo yonah prachodayat*

Translation by Deva Premal (modern Kirtan singer/artist):

*Through the coming, going, and the balance of life
The essential nature illuminating existence is the adorable one
May all perceive through subtle intellect
The brilliance of enlightenment*

Chanting mantras is a traditional method of moving from ‘sense withdrawal’ to ‘single-pointed focus of concentration’. In this way, mantra becomes a ‘tool for the mind’ that helps to bring us clearly into the present moment. When we repeat a word or phrase for a period of time, it not only helps to teach the mind to focus but also opens us up to an inner awareness in which thought slows right down. The more we chant a mantra, the deeper its effect on us. Each time we use a mantra, we become more entrained with it.

Although there are many ancient mantras, we can make up our own, as is the case in affirmations. Affirmations repeated in the 'present' tense have the strongest impact.

Sometimes mantras are paired with mudras to deepen their effects. Once such mudra and mantra meditation is known as *Sa, Ta, Na, Ma*.

SA, TA, NA, MA is a mantra representing the cycle of creation and holding the 5 primordial sounds.

- SA = birth
- TA = life
- NA = death
- MA = rebirth

The sound of 'A' = *infinite cosmos* and is found in all of the other mantra sounds above. **Sa Ta Na Ma** is said to represent **Sat Nam**, which translates as 'calling upon Truth'.

Meaning of the Fingers

- The thumbs represent Universal Self
- The index fingers represent the Individual Self
- The middle fingers represent the Ego
- The ring fingers represent Maya
- The baby fingers represent worldly actions and reactions

How To Practice *Sa, Ta, Na, Ma* Meditation

This meditation is done by combining each sound with a corresponding mudra, as follows:

- On chanting **SA**, touch your index fingers to the thumbs on the same hand
- On chanting **TA**, touch your middle fingers to the thumbs on the same hand while releasing the index finger
- On chanting **NA**, touch only the ring fingers to the thumbs on the same hand
- On chanting **MA**, touch the baby fingers to the thumbs

Continue this cycle from index fingers to baby fingers throughout the entire meditation.

Other variations that can be used with this mantra meditation are:

- **Voice:** Repeat the meditation in a normal voice for 1 minute, followed by whispering it for 2 minutes, followed by silently repeating it to yourself for 4 minutes and completing it by whispering the mantra for another 2 minutes then speaking it in a normal voice for 1 minute.
- **Touch:** When touching the index, middle, ring and baby fingers to the thumbs, you can vary the type of touch, as follows:
 - As you bring each finger to the thumb, touch the finger nail to the thumb pad, or;
 - As you bring each finger to the thumb, touch the tip of the finger to the tip of the thumb, or;
 - As you bring each finger to the thumb, touch the pad of the finger to the pad of the thumb.

This meditation can be made as complex as you like, depending on how much the mind can handle. When teaching this to Beginners, it is best to keep it simple and build upon it in later classes.

Benefits:

- Helps to reduce effects of stress
- Balances left and right brain hemispheres
- Helps to develop focus and clarity; calms the mind
- Creates and sustains a mind/body connection during meditation

Chakra Mantras

Western science has discovered what ancient yogis knew; that sound waves affect matter. But ancient yogis took it a step further as they believed that sounding/chanting affects consciousness as well. In Hindu philosophy, everything in the universe is made of sound; the essence of anything is represented by a ‘seed sound’ or ‘bija mantra’. When we chant the seed sounds of the chakras, we can better resonate with the energy of any given chakra, giving us the power to access the energy inherent within that chakra and to transform it, if necessary.

Each chakra is associated with an element; the seed sounds give us access to the qualities of that element. The seed sounds or *bija mantras for each of the chakras* are as follows:

<i>Chakra</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Seed Sound/Bija Mantra</i>
Root Chakra/Muladhara	Earth	Lam
Sacral Chakra/Swadhisthana	Water	Vam
Solar Plexis Chakra/Manipura	Fire	Ram
Heart Chakra/Anahata	Air	Yam (or Sam)
Throat Chakra/Visuddha	Ether/Space	Ham
Third Eye Chakra/Ajna	Light	Om
Crown Chakra/Sahasrara	Thought	Silence (the sustained vibration after a mantra)

The sound of ‘mmm’ at the end of each of the bija mantras is said to correspond with the maternal, Divine Mother aspect of the Universe. The ‘aaa’ sound is said to represent the Divine Father.

In addition to seed sounds, each chakra also has a corresponding vowel sound that, when chanted, can have a powerfully transformative impact on the energy of that chakra. Some people prefer to work with the vowel sounds, rather than the bija mantras. Try both and see what feels best for you.

Vowel Sounds for the Chakras

Chakra	Vowel Sound
Root/Muladhara	Oh (as in Om)
Sacral/Swadisthana	Oooo (as in 'cool')
Solar Plexus/Manipura	Ah (as in Father)
Heart/Anahata	Ay (as in Play)
Throat/Visuddha	Eeee (as in Seed)
Third Eye/Ajna	Mmm (this is not an actual 'vowel')
Crown/Sahasrara	Nnng (as in Sing)

Perhaps the most recognized mantra is that of **OM** or **AUM**. This is generally described as the primordial sound of the universe; the sound from which everything within the universe was created and containing all the seed sounds. For Christians, the mantra *Amen* is similar to Aum.

Other Commonly Practice Mantras

Om Ah Hum

These three powerful syllables are often used to purify an environment prior to engaging in ritual or meditation.

Om Mani Padme Hum

Translated as "The jewel of the lotus resides within", *Mani Padme* is said to represent the *jewel in the lotus* (divine essence), a key belief at the heart of Buddhism. *Hum* represents the limitless reality within each individual; chanting *Hum* unites the individual with the universal. It is the mantra of the *Buddha of Compassion*, known by the Chinese as *Goddess Kuan Yin*. The mantra calms fears, soothes concerns

I Am That I Am: This is an English version also designed to unite the individual with the universal.

Om Nama Shivaya

Translated as "In the name of Shiva", this is one of many mantras that utters one of the many names of God. Another lovely translation is "I honor the divinity within myself". Any God or Goddess name can be used to create a mantra.

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu

This mantra is commonly associated with the Jivamukti Yoga School. It translates to "*May all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and to that freedom for all.*" This mantra encourages cooperation, compassion and living in harmony, not only among other humans but with nature as well.

Mantras/Chants for Daily Living and Their Translations

***Jaya Ganesha; Jaya Ganesha
Jaya Ganesha Pahimaam
Sri Ganesha; Sri Ganesha
Sri Ganesha Rakshamaam***

Jaya means *hail* or *victory to*. *Ganesha* is the *elephant-headed deity* who removes obstacles. *Pahimaam* means *save me* and *Rakshamaam* means *protect me*.

***Saravanabhava; Saravanabhava
Saravanabhava Pahimaam
Subramanya; Subramanya
Subramanya Rakshamaam***

Saravanabhava (or Subramanya as he is also known) is the leader of the army of gods. His job is to destroy all demons. He drives off all evil influences and ensures victory in battle (inner and outer).

***Jaya Saraswati; Jaya Saraswati
Jaya Saraswati Pahimaam
Sri Saraswati; Sri Saraswati
Sri Saraswati Rakshamaam***

Saraswati is the Goddess of the arts and wisdom. Invoking her name helps one to develop intelligent self-control, ability and success in deep study and scholarly pursuits. She bestows increased intuition and mystical wisdom. She also represents love and beauty.

***Jaya Guru; Siva Guru; Hari Guru Ram
Jagad Guru; Param Guru; Sat Guru Shyam***

In this chant, the guru is saluted as the personification and transmitter of Divine Wisdom. Traditionally, the guru is personified in the forms of Siva (destruction) and Rama (incarnation of the God Vishnu – preservation).

***Hare Rama; Hare Rama
Rama Rama; Hare Hare
Hare Krishna; Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna; Hare Hare***

This is known as the *Maha Mantra*, meaning *Great Mantra*. It is said to be the most powerful mantra and, as such, should always be sung in its entirety and not broken.

***Om Namah Sivaya Gurave
Satchidananda Murtaye
Nishprapanchaya Shantaya
Sri Sivanadaya Te Namah
Sri Vishnudevandaya Te Namah***

This is translated as “Salutations to Guru Siva (Sivananda) who is the embodiment of ‘Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, in whom worldliness does not exist, who is ever peaceful. Salutations to Swami Vishnu Devananada.”

Om Namō Durga Ma; Om Namō Lakshmi Ma

Durga is the aspect of our inner divine connection that is totally fearless. *Lakshmi* is the wellspring of infinite supply within.

Om Krim Kalikayai Namah

This translates to “I bow my head to the Goddess Kali”. The Goddess Kali is a fierce Goddess who represents the necessity of destruction in the overall cycle of life/death/rebirth. You can call on Kali when you are ready for serious transformation.

Mantras and Prayers from Other Traditions

Mantras, prayers and affirmations are found in spiritual traditions around the world. Here are some examples that you might wish to explore in your meditation practice.

Divine Light Invocation

*I am created by Divine Light
I am sustained by Divine Light
I am protected by Divine Light
I am surrounded by Divine Light
I am ever growing into Divine Light*

Christian Serenity Prayer

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna

This is a popular pagan chant of various Goddess names from different traditions. Each Goddess is imbued with a powerful energy and calling on all of them creates a powerfully transformative mantra.

A Blessing for the Senses

This is an original chant/blessing created by author and poet John O'Donohue in the book
"Anam Cara – A Book of Celtic Wisdom"

May your body be blessed.

May you realize that your body is a faithful and beautiful friend of your soul.

And may you be peaceful and joyful and recognize that your senses are sacred thresholds.

May you realize that holiness is mindful gazing, feeling, hearing and touching.

May your senses gather you and bring you home.

May your senses always enable you to celebrate the universe and the mystery and possibilities in your presence here.

May the Eros of the Earth bless you.