

Swami Sudhir

M A N T R A S



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Introduction

In may 2001 I met Swami Sudhir while I was staying in the Swami Dayananda Ashram in Rishikesh for two weeks. His appearance is one of overwhelming friendliness and modesty. As a Brahmacharya he was studying the scriptures under the guidance of Swami Dayananda and Swami Sakshatkrtananda. It was confusing for me when I found out about his perfect knowledge of the Vedic scriptures and his great experience with performing religious Hinduistic rituals. Confusing, because he looked so young to me (though he was 35) and also because it confronted me with my preoccupied mind: friendly and modest people are not intellectual. Now this humble and modest Sudhir turned out to be a very intelligent man.

Sudhir was educated at the university to be an engineer. In his late twenties he realised the emptiness of a luxury life. This was unbearable. He quit his well-paid job at a car factory, gave away all his possessions and started wandering. After two years he was picked up from the street by Swami Dayananda and Sudhir became a brahmacharya.

At the time I met him I was looking for inspiration and knowledge about mantra meditation. With some Dutch men I had just been to the Shankaracharya of Shringeri, Shri Bharati Tirtha, mahaswamigal. All of us were experienced in meditating with a bija mantra. Some of my friends though were not very happy with their mantra and so they asked for a new mantra from the Shankaracharya. To me this did not seem the right way to do. But I could not clearly explain why, so I decided to investigate in this subject.

I asked Swami Sudhir if he could provide me with information about mantras. The next two days I just had to push the 'record'-button of my cassette recorder. Swami Sudhir started talking and could go on for hours. All my questions were answered. All my doubts were cleared. I was so happy.

Although I had received so much information already, still at my departure from the ashram I dared to ask him if he was willing to write an article about mantras. Without any hesitation he said yes. When I was back in Holland, I received an email within two weeks. It turned out to be an extensive yet comprised treatise about mantras. As for my question stated above, the direct answer to this can be read in the last two sentences of this article.

Sudhir permitted me to share this writing with everone who showed interest. Are you interested?

Rob van Dijk,
Boyl, 2002

Mantras

Mantra is derived from the Sanskrit root *man* (to think).

Mantra is a thought, indicating something subtler, deeper and unknown to the five senses of knowledge.

All the scientific principles like the 'Law of Gravity' or the 'Theory of Relativity' are unknown to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Knowledge is directly revealed to the 'inner instrument' or *antah#karana*. Mind is also called by that name in Sanskrit. Mind in an intuitive state directly understands all the higher laws. One who knows these higher and subtler laws, unknown to the five senses, is called a scientist in the modern world and is called a *rishi* in Sanskrit.

Rishi means *rishati janati iti rishih*: one who sees and knows. Sees and knows all these higher and subtler laws. *Rishi* is a seer: a seer of Mantras.

Mantras are codified forms of the various facets of the Truth.

Mantras are seen by *rishi's* in their transcendental mental states, in higher realms of consciousness.

Every mantra has a *rishi*, a meter and a deity indicating a facet of the Ultimate.

Mantras are sound symbols and are all codified.

Mantras consist of one or more letters. A letter in Sanskrit is called *aksharam*. *Na ksharati iti aksharam*: one who does not perish is called *aksharam*. The ultimate Truth also is called *aksharam*. This is in the relative phenomenal existence. According to the Veda's and even to the Hindu mythology the whole creation is a manifestation and unmanifestation. The same thing is now more or less accepted by all of the top physicists, that whatever is now manifesting was there earlier in an unmanifest condition. The Truth according to the Veda's is Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss and contains the whole creation including time and space. By knowing this ultimate Truth one becomes that or gains that, according to the Veda's. Hence keeping this goal of gaining the ultimate to become completely free from sorrow, suffering and all limitations, individuals take to the study of scriptures, prayers, austerities and deep contemplations and meditations. In that process some of them happen to see various facets of the Truth. They are called *rishi's* or *Mantra Drashtaraha*, one who sees mantras. Thus mantras are facets of the Truth in codified or capsule form.

A mantra contains at least one syllable and can contain any number of syllables. These one-syllable mantras are called *bija aksharas* or *bi-ja's*. *Bija* means a seed. In Sanskrit when *bija* is reversed it becomes *jiba* or *jiva*, which means the individual. Both the individual and the seed are eternal because no one can ever say when the first individual or the first seed started. They started with the creation itself. Now each of these *bija mantras* reflects different aspects of the Truth in a subtler way. Some examples for *bija's* are *Om, Hrim, Shrim, Klim, Im, Dum* and so on.

Types of mantras

Mantras can be categorized in various ways. We will categorize mantras according to

1. The Origin
2. The Purpose

According to the Origin:

1. Vedic Mantras
2. Tantric Mantras
3. Pauranic Mantras

According to the Purpose:

1. For a particular result
2. For general well being
3. For the ultimate good or *moksha*.

Vedic mantras

Veda is from the Sanskrit root *Vid* (to know).

Veda is a body of knowledge covering all aspects of life and creation. It is one body of knowledge, but as it was too vast for the sake of convenience a great *rishi Veda Vyasa* divided it into four parts and gave them four names. He was called *Veda Vyasa* because he divided the *Veda*.

The four *Veda*'s are *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharvana Veda*.

Each *Veda* again is divided into four parts called

1. *mantra bhâga*
2. *brahmana bhâga*
3. *âranyaka bhâga*
4. *upanishad* or *Vedanta*.

Bhâga means a part. (*â* indicates a pronunciation of elongation of a, like a in 'are').

All the verses in the *mantra bhâga* are also called mantras only.

All Vedic Mantras are having intonations for pronunciation and it is very important for them. Correct pronunciation of words is essential. Intonation is over and above this condition.

There are various important mantras from the *Veda*'s, like

gayatri mantra

maha mrutyunjaya mantra

panchakshari mantra

ashtakshari mantra etc.

There are many *Shanti Mantras* for individual as well as universal peace and happiness. Vedic mantras are mainly used in Vedic fire rituals called *yajñyâs* and *yâgâs*. Every mantra has a particular place in the ritual and is to be associated with a particular procedure to offer oblations in the fire. Nowadays, since these rituals became rare, individuals are using these mantras mainly for chanting to promote individual and universal peace.

In general all these mantras for peace are ended with uttering of the word *Shanti* (Peace) three times.

Shanti or Peace can be disturbed by various reasons. These reasons can be categorized into three groups viz. *âdhi davika tâpa*, *âdhi bhautica tâpa*, *dâhyatmika tâpa*.

- The first one is the *tâpa* or afflictions born due to natural calamities etc. like foods, earthquakes, cyclones, tornado's etc. on which the human being has very less control.
- The second one is afflictions like strikes, wars, battles, insect bites, epidemics and so on.
- The third type of afflictions is due to the individual alone, from one's own body and mind.

In fact all types of afflictions can fully be covered under these three categories. In order to ward off these three types of afflictions these mantras are used with a prayer to the Universal Intelligence.

Tantric mantras

Tantra is from the root *tanu vistare*: to expand. All the tantric practices are having this goal of expansion of individual consciousness to the total consciousness or Unity consciousness.

Tantra is a rebel child of Vedic tradition. The reason for this was that Vedic tradition in course of time became more and more rigid in its practices and also was not allowing many practices to women and certain categories of the communities. In reality Vedas are very liberal in their outlook. But certain people in power started misinterpreting and they abused their privilege. This led to the rise of tantras. Tantras have tantra, mantra and yantra as its accessories. Tantra is the ritualistic portion, mantras may contain one or more than one syllable, while yantra is a diagrammatic representation of the deity of worship drawn on a copper, brass, golden or on a *pancha loha* plate (five metals).

Tantric mantras and practices are esoteric in nature. They are very popular, for they are believed to give quick results.

An example of a tantric mantra is *Om Im Hrim Shrim Shree Matre Namaha*.

Another one is *Ka Ye E La Hrim Ha Sa Ka La Hrim Sa Ka La Hrim Shrim*. This is the famous *Shodashakshari* Mantra (16 lettered mantra). If the last *Shrim* is dropped then it is called *Panchadashakshari* Mantra (15 lettered mantra). There are innumerable mantras in tantra, given for different purposes. Mantras are handed down in tradition from person to person and not taken from books. They need to be practiced at least for some time by that individual. The *bija's* are considered as living only if taken from a living person and are considered ineffective if taken from books. Some people and traditions claim that mantras obtained in dreams through yogis, siddhas and earlier saints are also effective. Tantric mantras are always followed or preceded by rituals, worship and prayers. Tantra again has two methods. One is called *vama marga* or 'left hand method' and the other is called *dakshina marga* or the 'right hand method'. Mantras in them are different and so are the practices. The left hand method mainly employs sex as a means to expand the individual consciousness, whereas the right hand method employs various meditation techniques to achieve this end.

Pauranic mantras

Puranas are secondary texts of Hindus. They are based on Vedas but are full of stories and are poetical.

The authenticity of the *puranas* also is in question. Each *purana* claims certain things, which are negated by the other *purana*. But in their ultimate content they do not differ from the *advaita*, though they talk in terms of dualistic language. *Puranas* when not properly interpreted, lead a person to confusion. Sometimes their descriptions are so exaggerated that one loses all the faith in these books. When *puranas* are properly interpreted, they lead to a vast bank of knowledge through stories and parables. Very difficult metaphysical truths are described in easy language.

Puranas are 18 in number. There are many mantras given in these 18 *puranas*.

Mantras derived from *puranas* are called *Pauranic Mantras*.

Vishnu Purana, *Padma Purana* and *Bhagavat Purana* give lot of mantras of Lord *Vishnu* and Lord *Krishna*. *Shiva Purana*, *Markandeya Purana* etc. give a lot of mantras of Lord *Shiva* and so on.

Mantras chanted for a particular result

Mantras are chanted for various purposes.

When a person chants a mantra for a particular result then they are called *sakâma*.

Kâma means desire. *Sa* prefix gives the meaning “with”, that means mantra chanting done with desires. The scripture accepts such worship. In the *Bhagavat Gita* Lord *Krishna* says that the devotees are of four types: *arta*, *artharti*, *jignayasu* and *jñani*.

1. *Arta* is one who is afflicted with troubles,
2. *Artharti* is one who wants to achieve some ends in life,
3. *Jignayasu* is one who is actively pursuing for the ultimate knowledge,
4. *Jñani* is one who has gained the ultimate knowledge.

The scripture accepts that all these four types of people ultimately will reach the final beatitude of life, namely *Moksha* or Liberation or Enlightenment. Given this background the scripture feels that there is nothing wrong in taking to some means to achieve the ends through prayers. When a person fails to achieve a thing through known means then he takes to the means called prayer by surrendering to the unseen Universal Intelligence. Mantra chanting is a prayer and hence can be used for that purpose.

Mantra chanting for general well-being

Mantras are also selected and chanted for general well-being of the individual, family, community, country or even the entire creation. Either for a desired end or for general well-being the important thing is the Intention, called *samkalpa* in Sanskrit. It is spelt out in the beginning clearly and then the chanting is taken up. Many times *japa* can be carried out for the sake of others also.

Mantras for moksha

Mantra chanting is also taken up by those aspirants who want nothing other than *moksha* or enlightenment. They take up the mantra chanting for removing various obstacles in their pursuit and thus try to obtain mental purity and focus. A balanced, pure and focused mind alone can think of *moksha* or enlightenment. This type of mantra chanting is called a *Nishkâma Upasana*. *Nishkâma* means without desire. Though the

desire for enlightenment is also a desire, it is never considered a desire in the scripture because it is a desire which removes all other desires and will bestow the individual a status from where he is no more bound by a desire but may still pursue desires with the freedom and fulfillment. Thus action is categorized as one which is done for the sake of happiness, completeness and fulfillment and the other one is action done out of fulfillment, completeness and happiness. Since *moksha* means fullness or completeness, the desire for moksha is not categorized as any other desire.

Mechanism of mantra

Now we will discuss how a mantra works on the body and mind.

The modern Mind-Body medicine has conclusively proved that mind works on the body directly, either in the adverse way or in a beneficial way.

Mind thinks in two ways. One is linear thinking and another is associative thinking. IQ is associated with linear thinking and EQ is associated with associative thinking. *Japa* breaks both these circuits and allows the mind to be in state of rest and awareness. It gives the mind wakeful rest. This is more effective than a long rest in relaxing the entire system. When *japa* of a mantra is done the next thought is known which is not possible otherwise. This leads to a certainty of the mind leading to rest and focus. It does not lead to monotony as it is stated generally, because each chant is full and complete in itself in meaning and feeling. When a mantra is chanted either verbally or mentally then it vibrates the brain matter and connects new neural circuits. This helps in higher understanding of the Truth as revealed by that mantra. But this effect comes after repeating the mantra for a long period of time and bringing in the resonance effect in the brain. For this the seers developed various methods. How much a mantra is to be chanted and how it is to be chanted etc. were all given in the Mantra *Shastra* (Scripture of Mantras).

Japa or mantra chanting

There are two types of results for every activity. One is called “*Drishta Phala*” or “Seen Result” and the other is called “*Adrishta Phala*” or “Unseen Result”. Many times we see that, though all known factors are taken care of, still the result does not come as it is expected because still some unknown factors played there. All prayers are meant to take care of this unknown factor because known factors are supposed to be addressed by the individual pragmatically. When the individual is not in a position to take care of a known factor due to incapacity to do so then one can take recourse to a prayer to gain strength and capacity to take care of those known factors. In *Bhagavat Gita* Lord says “*Karmani eva adhikaraha te mâ phaleshu kadachana*”. You have right over action only but not on its results because results are taken care of by the law of karma. Then the Lord says “*Mâ karma pahalahetuhu bhut mâ te sangotsva karmani*”, let you not be the causes of the results and at the same time do not take to inaction just because the results are governed by the laws of action and reaction.

Given this background *japa* or ‘mantra chanting’ is mainly taken up to take care of the *Adrishta Phala* portion or for taking care of the Unseen Factors. Hence here the *japa* is more centred on chanting with a prayerful attitude. Where as mantra meditation is directly to attain tranquility and peace of mind which is a *Drishta Phala* or seen result.

In Sanskrit there are two ways of looking at the meaning of a word. One is *Vyutpatti Artha* or 'derived meaning' from the root. The second one is called *Roodhi Artha* or 'commonly known meaning'.

- The derived meaning of *japa* is to think.
- The commonly known meaning of *japa* is to repeat a mantra number of times for a length of time.

Japa is a form of prayer.

If the repetition is done audibly then it is called *vâcika japa* and if it is done mentally it is called *manasika japa*. There are again variations in *vâcika japa* like loud chanting of the mantra or uttering the mantra at a very less sound wherein only the subject alone can listen and even less than that is muttering the mantra.

One needs to prepare oneself before one sits for chanting a mantra.

One needs to clean oneself physically, should sit in a clean spot with clean clothing and should prepare oneself mentally before starting to do the *japa*. For this purpose typically in the tradition elaborate methods are given. Again these methods are given according to the purpose for which a *japa* chanting is taken up.

If a person is aiming for some material gains through the *japa* chanting, then the rules to be followed are many and the procedures given are rigid.

If the aim for *japa* chanting is one of purification and focus of mind, thereby attaining spiritual progress, then the rules and procedures are very liberal.

For *sakâma mantra japa* (mantra *japa* for fulfilling a desire) the procedure is briefly given below.

1. Mantra *japa* must be accompanied by *puja* or worship of the deity.
2. The *puja* must be minimum a *panchopachara puja* (with five items viz. offering of water & flowers, incense, lights, food and camphor lamp) or else it must be a *shodashopachara puja* (worship with 16 items)
3. Worship of the idol or a *yantra* (diagrammatic picture of the deity on a special plate) is to be carried out.
4. Taking a bath before sitting for worship and *japa* and wearing of clean clothing. Also one should sit in the same place and same posture daily.
5. Spelling out a *samkalpa* (resolution or intention). A typical *samkalpa* will be like this: that I will be doing this many mantra chantings of this particular mantra for gaining this objective by pleasing the Lord who is the basis of this entire creation, sustenance and destruction.
6. If a mantra *purashcharana* is taken up, then a mantra is to be chanted for as many hundred thousand times as the letters in that mantra.
7. Also ten percent of the *japa* is the oblations in the fire and ten percent of it is to be *tarpana* or water offerings and ten percent of it is *marjanam* or ritualistic water sprinkling and ten percent of it is to be food offering to holy men. This entire procedure is called *purashcharana* of a mantra for gaining full results of a mantra *japa*. Also ten percent extra *japa* is done for the benefit of all those who are taking care of the subject as well as for the good of all.
8. Daily a fixed number of *japa* is to be carried out. One can use a *mala* or rosary beads of *rudraksha* or *tulasi* or spatica or crystal beads. Or else one can use the fingers in a particular way to count the *japa* chanting.
9. Chanting of *dhyana sloka* (meditation verse) and visualization of the form of deity to which the mantra represents is very essential.
10. Chanting of the mantra is done as an offering to this deity. Typically all the mantras are mantras expressing surrender to the deity or glorification of the deity.

If Japa is taken up with a view to purify and balance the mind then most of these above rules do not apply. Generally, only the *sankalpa* or resolution is done and the chanting is carried out. Even counting becomes secondary, because counting sometimes helps an individual to overcome lethargy and will help to sit for longer hours, whereas sometimes counting distracts the mind of the individual from *japa*. Hence counting is optional depending on the purpose of the individual in carrying out *japa*.

Mantra for deep relaxation (Mantra Meditation)

Meditation is understood and defined differently by different people. Meditation is used by many as a relaxation technique. Strictly speaking meditation, or *dhyana* in Sanskrit, is much more than relaxation. It is defined as *Saguna Brahma Vishaya Mânasa Vyaparaha*. The meaning of it is that it is a mental activity related to the *Saguna Brahma*. But before coming to this stage one needs to have a deep relaxation in both body and mind and mantra is found to be one which helps a great deal in this regard. In 1970s physiologist R.Keith Wallace proved that mantra meditation (Transcendental Meditation), which is a very deep relaxation technique, had profound effects on the body. He proved that mantra meditation helped one to enter “Restful Alertness” which Wallace called as “Hypometabolic Wakefulness” to indicate that the metabolism of the subject had decreased while he retained wakeful consciousness. Sleep is a hypometabolic state in which oxygen consumption decreases, heartbeat slows, and consciousness blanks out. The waking state, on the other hand, is marked by higher oxygen consumption, a faster heartbeat and an alert mind. Wallace found that these opposites were united in mantra meditation. He says that blood pressure, near-point-vision and hearing-threshold, which typically decline as people grow old, in fact improve in long-term practice of meditation. Dr. Deepak Chopra in his book titled ‘Ageless body, timeless mind’, mentions that overall health improves considerably as one practices mantra meditation. When one chants mantra and starts relaxing, one starts staying in his own original state of quietness, which is the basis of all the creation, which the modern physics call Quantum Space. There is silence in between two mantra chants and when looked into the process a mantra can be looked upon as the one, which rises in silence and goes back into silence. Silence is there throughout and a chant rises in it and goes back into it. Silence is the basis of all the sounds. Silence contains all sounds. This silence is not the relative silence, which again comes and goes. Relative silence is replaced by relative sound. But the absolute silence is the one, which is the basis of all sounds and even the relative silence. Absolute silence cannot be observed as an object of experience like any other object. Absolute silence can even be called absolute sound because both relative sound and relative silence derive their existence in the absolute. The *Mandukya Upanishad* talks about this and further discussion on this topic is carried out under the title *nirguna Brahma upasana*. Thus it is to be observed that in *mantra japa*, mantra chanting is the primary focus and in mantra meditation, relaxation becomes the main focus and the mantra is taken as a helping aid to just glide into a state of deep relaxation.

Opposition to mantra chanting and fallacy in the criticism

Bhuddhism

In traditional Buddhism, incantations and all types of rituals were prohibited saying that they have no saving power. The teachings found in the old texts of Buddhism state that Lord Buddha had prohibited doing mantra chanting. This needs to be analyzed a bit.

The incarnation of Buddha happened at a time when the Vedic rituals were conducted in large numbers and lot of animal slaughter was taking place. Lord Buddha condemned all animal killing and along with it he rejected the entire package of Vedas in order to make himself free from their traditions and practices. But when the content of the teaching is seen it is the same. Buddha emphasized *shoonya* or emptiness, which, when closely looked at, is completely the same as the *pūrna* or fullness of the Vedas. What was called as *shoonya* by Buddha was the *pūrna* of the Vedas.

So the teaching was the same, only the methods followed to understand and realize were different. This is one of the reasons why most of the Buddhist traditions very religiously practice mantra chanting; mantras of Buddha or *tara* or *padmasambhava* etc. They perform a lot of rituals also. The tantric Buddhism of Tibet is one very famous sect in this tradition. One very peculiar thing to be seen is though Lord Buddha had condemned killing of animals even many Buddhist monks are non-vegetarians.

Modern criticism

Now coming to the modern criticism of some people (like J.Krishna Murty, JK) about mantra chanting as a practice. It should dull the mind and make a person more non-thinking. This criticism is also unfounded. When a person is totally balanced, calm and focused then maybe he can take up a thought and continue to think about it. But as we had seen in the mechanism of mantra chanting that mind thinks based on the law of association and it simply jumps from one object to another if the direction is not continuously given. One who had developed those abilities of mind can only pursue this process of thinking and it is totally unreasonable to expect that every one should have that ability of the mind. We are condemning others for their inability to do that. Mantra helps in gaining the ability to think properly and in an organized way. It helps one to contemplate properly. Hence putting down the japa of a mantra is like removing the crutches without developing the ability to stand on one's feet and run. In fact even after one develops the capacity to contemplate one need to do mantra japa in order to rejuvenate and revitalize the capacity of the mind to carry out the contemplation effectively and efficiently. Because of these reasons the mantra japa should not be put down just because I had not practiced and do not believe in it. Millions have seen its results and this must also be kept in mind before passing on any judgment.

Method of mantra chanting

As it is already discussed above that mantra chanting or *japa* is carried out to ward off or to overcome all unknown and unseen causes of disturbance while mantra meditation is taken up to quieten the mind and thus the results are more seen in the present. In fact the scripture says that the physical *puja* with all worship material bestows results by removing all unseen obstacles. Whereas purely mental worship bestows immediate results of a quiet mind by removing the immediately seen obstacles. *Japa*, which is both a mental and a vocal prayer, has the effects of both these things and thus it attracts *adrishata* (or unseen results) and also *drishata* (seen results). Keeping these things in mind the *japa* or mantra chanting is taken up.

Some of the methods and rules of mantra chanting are given in the “*Japa* or Mantra chanting section”. There is one more very important procedure in *japa* which is called “*purasharana*”. *Purasharana* means chanting of the mantra as many hundred thousand times as the number of letters in the mantra. For example the *Gayatri Mantra* consists of 24 letters. Hence for *Gayatri Purasharana* one needs to do a minimum of 2400,000 chantings of *Gayatri Mantra*. In fact in addition to this, as given in the *japa* or mantra chanting section point no.7 *havan* or fire ritual, *tarpana* or water oblations, *marjana* or water sprinkling, *brahmana bhojana* or giving food to holy men and extra *japa* for the care takers ---- all this consists of a *Purasharana*. A constant number of *japa* is done daily in the same place and same time.

There is another type of *Purasharana*, called by name *Chandrayana*. In this method, mantra *japa* is taken up according to the cycles of the moon. On the new moon day the worship is taken up and on the first day after new moon day a *japa* of 1000 is done and daily 1000 *japa* is increased and thus one will be doing 15000 mantra chantings on the full moon day and again it will be reduced by 1000 daily to do 1000 on the day before new moon day. A count is kept for the total *japa* done. This is also performed along with restrictions on food both quality and quantity.

All these are taken up, as we had already seen, mainly to take care of the obstacles arising out of unseen factors but it also helps in obtaining seen result of a quiet and tranquil mind helping one to contemplate on the ultimate truth.

Upasana

According to Vedas what is there is only consciousness or awareness or pure intelligence. It is called *Brahman*. It is from the root *Brihat* in the meaning of Big. When we say big naturally a question comes: how big? Because big is always a relative word. But here the word Big is used as absolute, because comparison is possible only if there are two things. But if what is there is only one, where is the question of comparison? *Taittiriya Upanishad* in *Krishna Yajurveda* says that ‘What was there is only Brahman, which is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, created all this, whatever is here, out of it self’. It is both material and intelligent cause. In fact whatever we see here including our bodies and minds and all the laws governing the life and creation are nothing but that *Brahman* alone. The *Upanishads* say that by knowing that *Brahman* one attains that *Brahman* and is free from the sorrow of transmigration and all limitations. Thus the *Upanishads* point out that the cause of all suffering is due to the ignorance of this fact alone.

Though this is taught by the *Upanishads*, the listener does not understand this because of his previous conditioning and unquestioned assumptions laying in the mind for aeons. As the seeker of Truth starts to uncondition oneself and starts questioning his old assumptions he starts appreciating the truth more and more. This process during which an individual works hard to understand his own psyche, is called the period of *Sadhana*. In this period the aspirant takes to Listening, Reflection and Contemplation (*sravan, manana* and *nididhyasana*). In order to aid proper listening reflection and contemplation the aspirant takes to *upasana*.

Upasana means sitting near. *Upa* means near and *asana* means a posture. This sitting near does not mean sitting near anything. This implies sitting near oneself or *atma*. The scripture shows us that the *atma* or individual is non-separate from *Brahman* or the Total. Thus *upasana* means sitting near *Atma* or *Brahman*. In fact each of us is always near oneself and can never be separate from the Total. Then what is this sitting near oneself? This implies that the spiritual seeker should be conscious or aware of this truth at least during those particular moments selected for that purpose. When this concept of the *upasana* is not known then *upasana* loses its real purpose.

According to the scripture the entire creation is nothing but Brahman only and every aspect of it is nothing but that Brahman only. A *sadhaka* (aspirant or spiritual seeker) in the process of assimilating this truth worships various aspects of *Brahman*. Thus he slowly starts expanding in his consciousness. For his individual consciousness as separate from the total changes to the individual consciousness non-separate from the total consciousness. For this purpose worship of the total is carried out in various aspects according to one's own temperament. Thus an individual can worship that total by invoking it in any object of worship.

In the tradition innumerable forms were given by *rishi's* to suit to the temperaments of individuals. For example if Lord *Ganesha* is worshipped by an individual then the *japa* of the mantra for *Ganesha* is done. There are a number of mantra's for Lord *Ganesha*. One of them is *Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha*. The meaning of it is: I salute or surrender to Lord *Ganesha*. *Om* and *Gam* are *bija's*. They don't have any meaning but are sound symbols representing the truth in certain aspects. In this worship Lord *Ganesha* is looked upon as the Total. Thus the individual surrenders to the total and tries to lose the individual identity so that the total is appreciated leading to the understanding of the identity of the individual and the total as consciousness.

Though every deity is given certain qualities and shown as representing only certain aspects of the total, the final goal is as mentioned above. The scripture is trying to take the individual from where he is. For a person who wants to carry out an activity without obstacles is advised to worship *Ganesha*. Here really speaking, the quality of protecting one from various obstacles is invoked in the form of Lord *Ganesha*. Similarly if a student wants to learn then the quality of learning is invoked in a form called Goddess *Saraswati*. If one wants wealth then he will worship Goddess *Lakshmi*. Thus it seems there are hundreds and thousands of Gods and Goddesses in Hinduism but really speaking various aspects of the Total are invoked in various forms and various names are given for them. This can be beautifully described with two examples.

If a person wants wealth from a king then he goes to the king and praises him as the wealthiest man on earth and as the most generous donor. Whereas if he wants to be pardoned off for a mistake he will praise the King as the most powerful person on earth and as the most kind-hearted.

In both these cases the quality that is invoked is according to the need of the individual. Similarly the individual may be one but is a father or mother to the child, brother or sister to the siblings, son or daughter to the parents, wife or husband to the spouse, an employee to the employer or an employer to the employee, a citizen of the country, a member of various organizations, a player while playing, a spectator while watching and so on. The individual may be one but he can assume many roles. So even the total when looked upon from various angles gives various visions. All are correct from their standpoint but it needs to expand slowly.

Saguna Brahma upasana

The process of worshipping various aspects of the total is called *saguna upasana* (when joined in Sanskrit it becomes *sagunopasana*) or *saguna Brahma upasana*. Thus one can invoke the total in any form prescribed already and he can even select one on his own. The *shastra* (scripture) says that what is needed more is *bhakti* or *bhava* or devotion. It is the sincere devotion of the *bhakta* (a devotee) that brings in life to the idol and will bestow the *bhakta* with whatever is necessary to that *bhakta*.

The lives of great *bhaktas* like *Prahlada*, *Narada*, *Dhruva*, *Hanuman* etc. in the *Puranas* and the *Meera Bai*, *Tuka Ram*, *Ramakrishna Paramahansa* etc. of modern times have shown us that it is the *bhakti* or devotion that is the one thing what is essential and not the external practices. External practices may give one some *bhakti* and may lead him toward higher and higher understanding but external practices do not guarantee this. In the *Bhagavat Gita* chapter twelve is called *Bhakti Yoga*. Here Lord *Krishna* talks about who is a real *bhakta*. Nowhere in that discussion the Lord talks about external practices. What all he talks there is only attitudes and temperament that is needed. Moreover in chapter ten of the *Bhagavat Gita* the Lord says that I am *japa* among all *yajnyas* (spiritual rituals). This in turn shows that *japa* is given a high priority in the tradition for spiritual progress. *Saguna Brahma upasana* is invariably associated with *japa*, worship and meditation.

Nirguna Brahma upasana

Nirguna Brahma upasana means worship or contemplation on ‘*Brahman* without attributes’. In fact *nirguna Brahma* and *saguna Brahma* indicate as though there are two *Brahmans* and we are contemplating on them. There are no two *Brahmans*. What is there is only one *Brahman*, which is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, the

consciousness or awareness. When there is no creation what is there is only *Brahman* without any objects. Like for example in deep sleep nothing is experienced, there are no seer, seen or the act of seeing. It is called *triputi* (three things). In deep sleep there is no *triputi*. But no one can deny that he or she is existent during deep sleep. Though the experience of *triputi* is missing the individual in the form of pure consciousness exists. This is known only when *triputi* starts. This can be explained by an example.

When there is only light all around higher in the sky then light cannot be appreciated. To appreciate pure light an object is needed. So even to appreciate pure awareness or consciousness objects of waking or dream are needed. These objects are non-separate from the basis form, which they are manifesting.

Take the example of dream. In dream the dreamer, dream objects and the process of dreaming are all the same and are not different from the dreamer. All the animate and inanimate objects are non-separate from the dreamer who is pure consciousness. Same is the case with waker, waking objects and the process of waking experience. The Self is the same in both waking and dream and deep sleep. Because it is “Me” who experiences all these three states of experiences. In fact “I” experience many more states of experiences like intermediary states of experiences, which cannot be called waking, or dream. “I” experience the unconscious state called coma, “I” experience superconscious states called “*samadhi*” and so on. “I” is the same in all these experiences though this “I-sense” is missing in states where *triputi* is not there like in deep sleep, coma, thoughtless state or *samadhi*. I-Sense is not appearing in those states but “I” am not missing. Thus this One Consciousness, which is in and through all our experiences, is *Atma*, which is non-separate from *Brahman*. This is supported by the new world view as given by the modern quantum physicists. The Quantum Space is the womb of every thing. It appears like Void or Emptiness or Nothing. The Quantum Physics says that this quantum space contains everything and everything manifests from it. The Buddhist view of Emptiness or Void is also the same. But this quantum space is not really Empty or Void because Void or Emptiness cannot be the cause of Everything. Nothing can come out of Nothing. *Mandukya Upanishad* clearly talks about all this. Mantra six and seven clearly talk about the nature of this pure awareness. *Nāntha Prṅnam Na Bhi Pragynam*.... clearly states that this pure Consciousness is not associated with the external objects nor is it associated with internal objects nor is it associated with intermediary objects nor is it a mass of consciousness nor is it a mass of unconsciousness. Mantra seven says: ... *adrushtam avyavaharyam agrahyam* ..., it can not be perceived by the five senses of knowledge, it can not be handled by the five senses of action, it can not be transacted with, it can not be inferred, it can not be thought of, it can not be defined. Naturally one may think then it must be Empty or Nothing or Void but then the Mantra says that it is the Essence of the I-sense: *ekatmapratyaya sâram*. Then it says it is *prapanchopashamam* meaning that which makes the cessation of the world, *shântam* it is Peace itself, *shivam* it is auspiciousness itself, *advaitam* meaning non-dual, nothing else exists, *chathurtham manyante* meaning it is considered by the wise as the Fourth State (*Turiyam*). These words starting from *ekatmapratyaysaram* ... indicate that it is not void or empty but it is full, complete. It appears as nothing because there is no *triputi* at that time. In fact there are no Space and Time. Space and Time manifest in *Atma*. All of them are non-separate from *Atma* or *Brahman* but *Brahman* or *Atma* is not any one of them. This is *nirgunam*. There are no attributes in this *Atma* or *Brahman* but all attributes appear in that attributeless *Brahman* like even all the creation appears in and from the quantum space, which looks like empty space.

This *nirguna Atma* or *nirguna Brahman* cannot be thought of. Then how can one worship or doing *upasana* on this *nirguna Brahman*? It is not possible. But it is possible through contemplation, understanding and assimilation of this understanding.

OM

The sound symbol *AUM* or *OM* is considered as the name of this *nirguna Brahman*. *Nirguna Brahma upasana* is more in the form of understanding and contemplation rather than chanting of a mantra. Though *OM* chanting may be taken up by an individual who takes to this *upasana* but that is secondary only. The *upasana* is for appreciating the underlying Truth which is the basis of all states of experience and which is not opposed to any experience. The truth or consciousness or *Brahman* or *Atman* is unopposed to anything; it lends its support and basis for everything. This is considered as the highest accomplishment by *Veda*'s. Even *sagunopasana* is to lead one to this only but not all do have the capacity of mind to do this and hence different *upasanas* are prescribed to suit different people. Mantra is obviously a part of any *upasana*.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi of *Thiruvannamalai* in his work *Upadesa Saram* says: *kaya vak mana karyam uttamam, pujanam japa chintanam kramat*. The meaning is: all mental worship is superior to vocal prayer and vocal prayer is superior to worship with body (hands etc. with a lot of external items), similarly contemplation is superior to *japa* or mantra chanting and *japa* is superior to physical worship. Here *japa* again is categorized as *japa* of a mantra or *japa* of a *stotra* or verse (like thousand names of the Lord *Vishnu*, *Vishnu Sahasra Nama* or *Lalita Sahasra Nama* etc.) or *japa* of a text (like *Srimad Bhagavat Purana* or *Ramayana* etc). Thus *japa* has a role leading to contemplation of the *Brahman*, which is neither *nirguna* nor *saguna*. *Nir-guna* or attributeless is the word used in comparison to *sa-guna* or with-attributes. But in itself the Self or *Brahman* or *Atman* can be called as *saguna* or *nirguna* because it alone is *advaitam*, non-dual. It is free from *sajatiya*, *vijatiya* or *swagata bhedâs*. *Bhedâs* means differences. The Truth is free from differences born out of itself or due to members of the same class or from the members of other classes because it alone is. It is partless like space but is not space because waking space is negated by the dream space. Thus what is there is only One Non-Dual *Brahman*, which is non-separate from the Self, and thus the scripture reveals that the Self or *Atman* is the Whole, pure consciousness. This contemplation is aided by superimposing the waking, dream and deep sleep on *AUM* or *OM* sound symbol.

AUM or *OM* consists of three sounds. The first one is A pronounced as A in All. The second sound is U pronounced as OO in Room . The third sound is M pronounced as m in *Rim* or *Dim*. The first sound is a guttural sound and it is the first sound that is produced when one opens the mouth and it is the first letter in Sanskrit. The third or last sound is the sound which is produced when one closes the mouth and it is not possible to produce any other sound after producing this sound and at the most one can extend this to mmmmm... This sounds like a humming bee. The second sound is produced by twisting the lips and the tongue. This is the sound of rounding off all sounds in between the first and the last sounds that can be produced by the human acoustics. Thus *AUM* or *OM* covers all sounds. In the world every object is associated with a name and it is not possible to separate the object and the name of the object. All names are nothing but sounds. Thus *AUM* represents all the objects of the world. The first sound A represents the entire waking world. The second sound U represents the entire dream world and the sound M represents the deep sleep state. The silence, which follows the

last closing sound, represents the Truth that supports all these three states. This is considered as the fourth state, as though. This silence can be first looked upon as the silence between two *AUMs* but in reality *AUM* is raising in this silence and is sustained by this silence and is going back into silence. Thus silence remains as the basis of all *AUMs*. One fails to recognize this silence when there is the sound of *AUM* so even it becomes difficult to recognize the *Nirguna Brahma* as the basis of all *Saguna*. It is like a wave is rising in the ocean and is sustained by the ocean and is resolving into the ocean. There is no wave without an ocean. Ocean becomes the cause of the wave. But in reality both wave and ocean are nothing but water. There is no wave or ocean without water. From the standpoint of water there is only water. Water is not even the cause of waves. Waves and ocean are nothing but water. Thus whatever is here is nothing but *Brahman*, which is of the nature of Existence Knowledge Bliss Absolute.

Various types of mantras

In this section let us take some examples of mantras and discuss the meaning and methods of *japa*.

Ganesha

One mantra for Lord *Ganesha* is “*Om gam Ganapataye namaha*”

The meaning of this is: I salute to or surrender to Lord *Ganapati*. *Om* and *gam* are *bija*'s. *Om* is called the *pranava* or the *bija* for the *Brahman*. And *gam* is the *bija* for Lord *Ganapati*. Lord *Ganapati* means the Lord of all forces governing the universe. *Ganapati* has lot of other names. In Hindu tradition every God and Goddess has innumerable names and most of those names are the same or similar. The reason for this peculiar phenomenon is that all Hindu Gods and Goddesses have *nirguna Brahman* as the basis. Hence there is no conflict in all these worships and *upasanas*.

Namaha means surrender or salute. For this reason generally *namaha* is associated with the bringing of both palms together in front of the heart, reverentially and the head is bowed a bit. This particular gesture means that the head, which indicates ego, is brought down. Hands, which are normally separate, indicate the variegated world and their bringing together indicates the unity underlying the diversity. This done in front of the heart indicates that the unity is in ones own heart. Whenever one says “I did it” or “It’s me” then one points out at his heart area. Also sometimes in the tradition “*sashtanga pranam*” is done along with the *japa* of *namaha*. *Sashtanga pranam* means a surrender, which is well done with all eight limbs. The individual prostrates before the deity or the symbol in which he is invoking the divine. This prostration is done with all the major eight limbs touching the ground. The major eight limbs are the forehead, the mouth, the hands, the chest, the abdomen, the thighs, the feet and the mind. This indicates a total surrender. Surrender in reality is not physical but it is more an attitude and a deep feeling born out of an understanding of the limitations of the individual before the total and thus praying for the intervention of the total in furthering the understanding in the individual.

Again coming back to the mantra under discussion, it has 9 letters and *purasharna* of this mantra for *mantra siddhi* or accomplishing the results of the mantra is to be done as stated above in points 6 & 7 of *japa* of mantra chanting section.

Another mantra for “*Ganesha*” is “*Vakra Tundaya Hum*” & “*Om Hrim Grim Hrim*”

Shiva

Take another example for Mantra: *Om Namaha Shivaya*, a five-lettered mantra also called *panchakshari mantra* found in *Krishna yajurveda*.

The meaning is: “I salute or surrender to Lord *Shiva*”.

The derived meaning of *Shiva* is: ‘auspiciousness’.

The ultimate Truth is auspiciousness itself. Thus in this mantra also the individual is surrendering to the total in order to invoke the blessings of the total in the individual.

Another mantra for Lord *Shiva* is: “*Om Namo Bhagavate Rudraya*”.

One very famous and popular mantra is: *mrutyun jaya mantra*. Found in the *rudra prashna* section of *Krishna yajurveda*. This mantra is for overcoming the mortality and to attain immortality. That is it helps one understand that one essentially is the immortal *Atma* or consciousness itself. The mantra is: “*Om trayambakam yajamahe sugandhim*”

pushti vardhanam. Ūrvarukamiva bandhanât murtuyor mukshîya mâmrutât". There are intonations for this mantra and one should chant it with intonations.

Gayatri mantra

Another most important and popular mantra found in the Veda's is the *Gayatri Mantra*. In reality it is the *savitri mantra* or the mantra for the Sun God or it can be looked upon as the mantra for *Brahman*.

It is in *Gayatri* meter called *Gayatri chandas* in Sanskrit. In fact there are at least 50 known mantras in *Gayatri Chandas*, one as given below for *Rama mantra*.

This mantra which is done three junctions of the day, once when the night changes into day at the time of dawn, second at the mid noon, and the third at the dusk.

This mantra is:

"Om bhur bhuvahwaha.

tat savitur varenyam.

bhargo devasya dhîmahî.

dhiyo yonaha prachodayât".

This is considered as the mantra of 24 letters. The first three letters are not included in the count. This mantra has intonations and they are to be followed while chanting. This is a prayer done to the Infinite Consciousness. The individual says that I meditate on that Infinite Consciousness which is illumining the orb in the sun and the intellect in the individual. May that Consciousness enlighten our intellect.

Vishwa Mitra is the *rishi* for this mantra, *Gayatri* is the *Chandas* and *Savitri* or Sun God is the Deity.

Narayana

Another important mantra is: *Om namo Narayanaya*, an eight-lettered mantra called *ashtakshari mantra*.

The meaning is: "I surrender or salute to Lord *Narayana*". Lord *Narayana* is same as Lord *Vishnu*.

The derived meaning of *Narayana* is: "the goal of all human beings", and the meaning of *Vishnu* is: "One who pervades everything"

Rama

Another mantra is: *Om Shree Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Jaya Rama*. A fourteen-lettered mantra. The meaning is: hail to Lord *Rama* victory to Lord *Rama*.

Om and *Shree* are *bija*'s. Lord *Rama* is the incarnation of Lord *Vishnu* or Lord *Narayana* who incarnated for protecting the good and establishing *Dharma* on earth.

The derived meaning of *Rama* is: "one who revels in *Atma* or *Brahman*".

Another statement of *Upanishad* is "*Brahmavit Brahmaiva bhavati*" and "*Brahmavit apnoti param*". The knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* or the Knower of *Brahman* gains the ultimate. That means one who revels in *Brahman* is *Brahman* alone.

Another mantra for Lord *Rama* is: "*Râm Ramaya namaha*". Another one is: "*Hum Janakîvallabhaya Swâha*" and the *Rama gayatri mantra* is "*Om Dâsarathaya vudmahe seeta vallabhaya dhîmahî. Tanno Râmaha prachodayât*".

Vāsudeva, Krishna

Another mantra is: *Om namo bhagavate Vasudevaya*, a twelve-lettered mantra or *dwadaskshari mantra*.

The meaning is I salute or surrender to Lord *Vāsudeva*. *Vāsudeva* is Lord *Krishna*, is the son of *Vasudeva*. Lord *Krishna* is also an incarnation of Lord *Narayana* or *Vishnu*.

The derived meaning of *Vāsudeva* is: “the one who resides in all beings or who is the indweller of all beings”.

The meaning of *Krishna* is “One who attracts all”. All these meanings obviously imply *Brahman* but externally all these are having different forms and different methods of worship. Mantra letters are different in number, sounds are different but their underlying meaning and content is same.

Divine Mother

Another mantra is: *Om Im Hrim Shrim Shree Matre Namaha*. I surrender or salute to the Divine Mother, the Mother of the universe.

In this context a few words about the three-principle-Gods concept and the-divine-Mother concept.

In Hindu mythology one comes across three Gods, *Brahma Vishnu* and *Shiva*. This *Brahma* is different from the *Brahman* as discussed in the *nirguna Brahman* section. This *Brahma* is the creator. The three aspects of creation are allotted to different principles of the same *Brahman*, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

Brahma represents the creative principle or authority over creation.

Vishnu represents the sustenance principle or the authority over sustenance.

Shiva represents destruction or the authority over resolution. Destruction or resolution is also considered as auspicious because it is always looked upon as the first step in creation or life is not possible without its counterpart death.

Now coming to the Divine Mother concept, in the Hindu tradition the Mother is given a very significant role in one’s life. It is the Mother who bears the child in the womb for nine months nurturing it through her body fluids all along and afterwards also continues to nurture the child for a number of years. Mother forms the most important link in socializing the child. Thus in India, children easily associate themselves with their mothers and that is how India is called as Mother-Land by their natives and why they talk about Mother Tongue for their language where as in the west generally Father-Land is used. Thus the worship of the ultimate as the Divine Mother is in vogue. This mantra, as given above is a mantra for the divine mother. The *Shakti* or Energy principle always is associated with female principle in the tradition. The worship of the Divine Mother or *Shakti* or the Female Principle is the same. The entire *Tantra Shastra* or the scripture is based on the worship of *Shakti*. There are innumerable mantras in this with various practices. The most famous ten aspects of the *shakti upasana* are called “*dasa maha vidyas*”. Their names are: *Kali, Tara, Maha Vidya, Shodasji, Bhuvaneswari, Bhiravi, Chinna Masta, Dhumavati, Bagala Mukhi* and *Matangi*. There are different mantras for all these and the procedures given are different. The idols and the meditation verses are also different. Some other important mantras are “*Om Hrim Dum Durgayai Namaha*” and “*Om Im Hrim Klim Chamundayai Vicche*”

Tribal mantras

Now coming to some other mantras which are not very popular. One *Sābara Mantra Shastra* gives details of various mantras of all tribal mantras in various vernacular languages whereas all the mantras given above are in Sanskrit language. There are mantras for putting charms on snakes and other wild animals. Also there are mantras to remove the poison from the person due to snakebite and scorpion bite etc. The authenticity of these mantras is not checked by the author.

Harmful mantras

There are lots of mantras accompanied by esoteric practices, prescribed in *Atharvana Veda* for killing an enemy, attracting a woman or man, black magic etc. While giving these techniques the scripture clearly says that they ultimately harm the individual and will not help remove his sorrow or suffering. But gives them saying that such things do exist.

Benefits and limitations

The benefits of *mantra japa* or meditation using mantra are innumerable in the form of both seen and unseen results. The main benefit which the modern man can safely expect to get is the emotional balancing through mantra. This is a result which can be seen and hence there is no make belief in this. This in turn definitely helps in improving the physical health of an individual.

Limitations are always to be understood before taking up any endeavour. *Mantra japa* is not an exception to it. If one expects any miracles or some light and sound effects due to *mantra japa*, then he may be disenchanted or disillusioned. Any exaggerated subjective expectation which is not inherently present in the thing can always lead the person to be dissatisfied and loose charm in that practice. Mantra is not an exception to it. One should remember that mantra is an aid in discovering fullness and joy which are innate to us. Unreasonable expectations about the person from whom the mantra is to be taken etc. always leads to a change of *gurus* and mantras. Mantra taken from a person who has done some amount of *japa* of that mantra sincerely is good enough. Many modern *gurus*, in the name of *Shakti Pat* or transferring the power of the mantra are simply exploiting the gullibility of the individuals. It is true that mantra is always to be taken from a living person and not from books. A live candle alone can light up another one so even a soul alone can touch another soul. But this does not mean that a person should keep on looking for some special person to do what he is supposed to do. No one can transfer the responsibility of understanding the Truth from himself to the *guru*. Hence excessive importance given in selecting the person and the mantra is not considered prudent. Better than that is to stick with the mantra and what it is doing for some time with interest and one should understand that as an aid in the ultimate spiritual progress.

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