

# The Practice & Teaching of Mantra

There are fourteen different types of mantra practice which have in more recent times often been reduced to four types:





## Types of Japa:

Vachika	voiced aloud
Upanshu	whispered
Manasa	mental repetition (most powerful)
Likhita	written in a special book with due consideration

## Note whichever form of mantra we practice:

Ultimately, we must not use mantra to repress challenging thoughts and emotions, as although mantra can help to stabilize thought and emotion, they will still need to be fully experienced and addressed in a healthy way.

Generally, we practice in a grosser way at first, and this has its benefits, then gradually we move towards a more subtle practice so.....

Gross 		Subtle	
Simply recite		Recite with Feeling	
Chant aloud		Chant mentally	
Choose our speed		Moves at its own speed	
Form of expression		Form of attention leads to concentration, meditation & samadhi	
Generally, there is a natural progression as we practice mantra:			
1 <sup>st</sup> Focus on external name and meaning of mantra 	2 <sup>nd</sup> Focus on feeling behind mantra 	3 <sup>rd</sup> Connection to silence behind mantra	
At first for the recitation of mantra willpower is needed i.e. JAPA 		Eventually listening to or remembering mantra as it repeats itself i.e. AJAPA	
When we move from japa to ajapa mantra this will occur naturally as we move from concentration to meditation.			
Japa: is using will either: 1) as recitation 2) as listening		Ajapa is automatic mantra, either: 1) as an automatic recitation 2) as a constant listening	

There are factors altering the energetic effect of mantra to include:

- \* Altering the **intention** behind the mantra, i.e. the sound can be energized through the emotions and meaning we award to it
- \* Linking the mantra to a **specific image**
- \* Changing the **way in which the sound is made**, changing the impact of a sound (gross to subtle)
- \* Chanting more **repetitions**: traditionally mantra can be chanted whilst performing everyday activities; we can formally chant every day for 40 days
- \* Ensuring the actual **pronunciation** is correct which is why Vedic chanting is so precise

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## Use of a Mala



A mala is often used and traditionally this mala must be kept carefully and never worn. Generally, there are 108 beads although there is also a shorter wrist mala of 27 beads where four rounds equals 108. There is always a larger bead known as the Mount Meru, the mountain bead. There can also be one bead offset called the Sumeru, which acts to bring back concentration if the counting has become too mechanical.

We use the right hand for the mala, keeping the index finger pointed away if possible. The thumb is used to count by drawing the beads one by one towards you. The round is complete once we have reached the Mount Meru bead, and we do not cross the Mount Meru bead rather we carefully reposition fingers and start again in the opposite direction.

**Teaching Mantra:** is potentially problematic because:

- mantra often appears to be very foreign and culturally alien
- students may wonder what they are saying so can be resistant
- we can be unsure of chanting names of unknown gods
- the language of Sanskrit is often used and can be difficult to pronounce
- students (or teacher) can feel self-conscious about singing/chanting aloud
- the teacher may not feel experienced or confident enough to teach

**Potential ways to teach Mantra:**

**A) Start with Bija mantra i.e., the seed sounds of the Sanskrit Alphabet (Nirguna, i.e. without form).** Here we are creating a specific effect according to the vibration of the sound. Examples are:

⇒ **In Basic breathing:** Ujjayi in Anjali Mudra using movement (as if opening and closing a book) whilst mentally chanting So Ham. (pronounced So Hum)

[ 'So Ham' energetically lengthens, releases, emphasises exhalation / long opening 'o' and releasing 'm'. This translates as "I am that", emotionally surrendering to that beyond small sense of I; entering the flow; acceptance of what is.]

⇒ **Simple asana sequences:** such as practicing a cat to dog sequence mentally using **So Ham** for opening and releasing, emphasizing exhale. Alternatively practicing cat to dog sequence with its opposite **Ham Sa** with an energetic effect of emphasizing the inhale so it is more enlivening and lifting.

⇒ **Nadi Sodhana:** modifying the effect of pranayama, making its effect more powerful.

Right nostril relates to pingala nadi – Sympathetic part of ANS

Left nostril relates to ida pingala – Parasympathetic part of ANS

- Inhale Right nostril – mentally chant Ram (F) Increase fire burn ama – heating effect increased

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- Exhale Left nostril – mentally chant Yam (A) Drying kapha/mucous & ama – lightening effect increased
- Inhale Left nostril – mentally chant Vam (W) cooling & soothing effect
- Exhale Right nostril – mentally chant Lam (E) cooling & consolidating effect

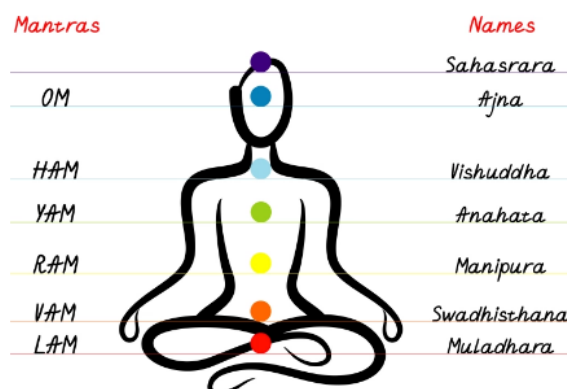
Helps to open nadis, strengthens tissues since they relate to elements, engages the mind, better balancing the heating/cooling effect.

We can also chant Ram as we inhale Right and Yam as we exhale Left to help with digestion before meals by increasing our inner fire!! Or to reduce heat and the fire element we can chant Vam as we Inhale Left and Lam as we exhale Right.

⇒ **We can use seed sounds in familiar sequences:** this is a good way to encourage students to make a sound!  
e.g. Surya Namaskar – Om hrum etc.  
Start with sounds, then sequence then both together  
Can be energising and concentrating

⇒ **We can practice bija sounds for specific effect mentally/verbally** e.g. Ram, Gam, Shreem etc. or chakra sounds: Lam, Vam, Ram, Yam, Ham, Om, Silence.

Pronounced  
'lumng' i.e. nasalised



From:  
somalunamystic.wordpress.com/2014/11/18/sound-healing-and-mantras/accessed 29.03.18

### B) Practices with Saguna mantras, i.e. mantras with form

- Perhaps start with simply listening to a chant either yours or from a recording maybe whilst lying in savasana or during a part of the practice.
- After a couple of times maybe invite them to read along whilst listening
- Invite students to chant along, quietly if necessary
- See if they can increase in confidence and sound and slowly turn the music down
- Eventually the group can chant alone

These can be devotional kirtans or vedic chanting....Some of the best known examples are:

#### Ganesha's Mantra

To remove obstacles helping with new endeavours

**Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha / Gam (pronounce gum)**

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## Durga's Mantra

For inner strength and protection.  
I bow to you Ma Durga, the Protector Goddess



*Om Hrim Shrim Dum Durgayai Swaha*

## Gayatri Mantra

Asking that our intellect may be illumined to lead us along the right path to self realization.

*Om bhur bhuvah swah, tat savitur varenyam  
Bhargo devasya dheemahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*

## Lord Shiva's Mantra

The Tryambakam mantra asking that we may released from bondage and become free.

Tryambakam yajamahe  
sugandhim pusti-varadhanam I  
Urvakam iva bandhanan  
mrtyor muksiya mamrtat (svam) II

*Trayambakam Yajaamahe Sugandhim Pushtivardhanam I  
Urvaarukamiva Bandhanan Mrityor Muksheeya Mamritaata (svaam)*

## From the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

*Om Asato Maa Sad-Gamaya |  
Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya |  
Mrtyor-Maa Amrtam Gamaya |  
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||*

Lead us from Unreality (of Transitory Existence) to the Reality (of the Eternal Self),  
Lead us from the Darkness (of Ignorance) to the Light (of Spiritual Knowledge),  
Lead us from the Fear of Death to the Knowledge of Immortality.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

## Panchadashi Mantra Mantra of the Sri Yantra

*Om Hrim  
Ka E I La Hrim  
Ha Sa Ka Ha La Hrim  
Sa Ka La Hrim*

