



Mindful Living Matters

Yantra & Mantra - Symbols and
Sound in Yoga

In Hinduism there are three aspects of worship – Yantra, Mantra and Tantra.

Yantra uses the physical and visual aspects of ritual. In yoga this could mean the setting up of the yoga space including laying down the yoga mat, burning incense, placing symbols or images around the yoga room.

Tantra uses the feeling aspects of ritual. In its original form Tantra referred to certain bodily postures and personal mind control techniques. Today there is a misconception that Tantra is achieved through sex. While it is true that 'tantric' sex is a form of instant "enlightenment" for some, in its historic and simplistic pure form Tantra can refer to the concentration one pays while doing a yoga posture or performing a mindful act.

Mantra uses sound generation to lift energy, create intense feelings, set the mood and awaken the spirit. Chanting a sacred sound can be one word or a set of syllables. Using mantra produces a vibration with the body and projects this into the universe.

These notes will focus on the aspects of Yantra and Mantra which you can all use to enhance your yoga practice.

Mantra and Chanting

There are many different reasons for using mantras or chants some ranging from spiritual, to cultural and possibly some bordering on religious. However I like to use mantra to focus my thoughts. I find picking a mantra and using each word to direct my breath. In some cases just singing the words can make me feel psychologically better while other times I actually ponder the meaning behind it.

The use of mantras and chanting is as individual as meditating itself. Find something that works for you. Explore it for yourself.

My favourite mantras & chants:

- Om mani padme hum (I am a jewel lotus flower)
- So hum (I am all that)
- OM (believed to be the Universal sound)
- Sa – Ta – Na – Ma (Birth – Life – Death – Rebirth)
- Om Shanti Shanti Shanti (Peace to you, peace to others, peace to the universe)



Om Mani Padme Hum

Om Mani Padme Hum - means that in dependence on the practice of a path which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha.

Om - symbolize one's impure body, speech and mind, and also the pure noble body, speech and mind of a Buddha

Mani - the jewel, symbolizes factors of method, compassion and love, the altruistic intention to become enlightened

Padme - means lotus and symbolizes wisdom

Hum - means inseparability; symbolizing purity & can be achieved by the unity of method and wisdom



Links of Interest

Om Mani Padme Hum – when I was in India I meet the most wonderful Nepalese Man. I actually bought a traditional Om Mani Padme Hum mandala from him. He also gave me a copy of a Buddhist Monk Mantra. I love using this sound to meditate. By the end I am chanting this out loud. I have found it on You Tube so you can all enjoy the same sounds.

<http://youtu.be/bbgHZWwyhcQ>

Om - Chanted 108 times (use with Mala Beads)

<http://youtu.be/8EhCHVVbtpU>

Om – think this just sounds awesome and a pretty mandala (of sorts) to look at

<http://youtu.be/CQUQmG0OnV4>

Om – with Binaural sounds (I am just starting to explore these sounds so can explain more as I learn more). This is a shorter chanting session.

<http://youtu.be/ApINbGVpYEs>

RaMaDaSa – I have included this because I really Like Snatam Kaur. She has a beautiful sound.

<http://youtu.be/kYivP3gedCo>

Sa-Ta-Na-Ma – this is a beautiful version; you could also try Snatam Kaur's version on her Feeling Good CD

<http://youtu.be/xASC7Nav0J0>



Yantra and Mandalas

Art work or physical objects can be used as a tool to focus the mind.

A mandala is a circular object or shape that represents wholeness or oneness. A Mandala reminds us of the cosmic unified structure of life. Mandalas can be found everywhere – from nature (the moon and sun, flowers, spider webs, the shape of our galaxy), to architecture (Mosques, cathedrals, labyrinth designs), to symbolic representations in art (Hindu and Tibetan art) and cultural representation.



Centre of the mandala is held at eye height about two feet away from you.

The object is to gaze at your mandala exploring the different parts moving from the outer edge inwards. When you reach the centre, close your eyes and visualise the mandala. Look for an inner connection between yourself and the mandala. Feel the energy travel between yourself and the mandala going deep within your inner core.



Focus

Focusing techniques include breathing, use of yantras / mandalas and mantras or chants. Other focusing tools include mala beads (prayer beads), similar to rosary.

Tools such as mala beads and mantras help to keep our mind from wandering.



Mala Beads

Acts like an anchor for the mind. Moving each mala bead with the rhythm of the breath provides a perfect focus and prevents the mind from being distracted by fleeting thoughts.

There are often 108 string of beads in a mala necklace. (Bracelets will often have 27 – another traditionally auspicious number) A mala bead necklace (and

bracelet) will have a master bead (sumeru, guru bead) often used as the starting and end point for you meditation. In some practices the master bead is never passed over. Therefore if you wish do continue with your meditation after 1 round, the mala is turned around to proceed again in the reverse direction. In other practices skipping over the master bead is accepted.

The master bead is thought to represent the higher consciousness or inner self.

Why 108 Beads?

Many reasons for their being 108 beads on a mala necklace, some spiritual significance, others mathematical and even scientific. There are plenty of theories abounding. A couple of my favourites:

- **Heart Chakra:** The chakras are the intersections of energy lines, and there are said to be a total of 108 energy lines converging to form the heart chakra. One of them, sushumna leads to the crown chakra, and is said to be the path to Self-realization.
- **Pranayama:** If one is able to be so calm in meditation as to have only 108 breaths in a day, enlightenment will come.
- **Pentagon:** The angle formed by two adjacent lines in a pentagon equals 108 degrees
- **Sanskrit alphabet:** There are 54 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. Each has masculine and feminine, shiva and shakti. 54 times 2 is 108.
- **First man in space:** The first manned space flight lasted 108 minutes, and was on April 12, 1961 by Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet cosmonaut.

I have also read that to complete a whole cycle of a mala necklace is to finish at 100 but the necklace holds 108 to allow for 8 errors or distractions. I particularly like this because it reminds me I am human and subject to failures at some point in my life however I am still able to proceed without punishment or judgement of those failings.