

The Spirit of Mantra

The word Mantra is defined in my Sanskrit dictionary as a sacred word or phrase of spiritual significance and power; hymns; “that which saves the one who reflects” (from the verb root man = “to think”); form of sound.

A mantra is a verbal formula, a sound structure of significance and they can be used to create, modify, or destroy gross material things. Anyone who has sailed in a ship's fo'c'sle, or spent time in the army, will be aware of low type mantras of a repetitive and rudimentary nature, that can be threatening and forceful expressions of not always harmonious intent.

Mantras that are pleasant sounding, if not completely understood, are occasionally used in Yoga classes, as they help focus the mind and are often spiritually uplifting. Yoga Mantras are linked to the Sanskrit language and to a time when ancient seers divined the language and saw its sound structures as the underlying template that gives rise to the material world.

This awareness of the creative power of the word is not confined to Sanskrit as we read in St. John's Gospel ch1.v1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The Greeks had a name for this word, and it was Logos, which also means ratio, that is the ratio of all things.

Mantras can be said aloud, whispered, repeated mentally and the essence of the sound carried into the stillness that is beyond form, and it is these levels of application that can help us to understand them.

My own teacher Eugene Halliday, who had mastered the difficult Sanskrit language, when speaking about the transforming power of words, referred to consonants as personalised spirit and the vowels as representing pure spirit.

To have the spiritual insight to unlock the spiritual significance of words and mantra is an unusual gift and the Yogi who is competent to arrange a mantra is called a mantrakara. An important start to understanding the spiritual significance of words and mantra is to be clear about meaning, as words have different levels of significance. A passive vocabulary consists of words, that because of their emotional charge tend to control us and these can be powerful tools in the hands of those who have undertaken some motivational research and want to control or sell us something. An active vocabulary consists of words that we can clearly define and of which we have full control.

Clearly defined words help to raise our understanding to that level of Truth, which first gave them utterance. To unlock the spirit of mantra will initially require the help of a mantrakara Guru, or a realised being able to guide our meditations, and unlock the spiritual significance of the many words and phrases we use.

For example: - the words 'Praise Be To God', starts with the consonant 'P' which can be represented as the Positing power of spirit, and when whispered, as form without substance.

'R' is representative of the principle of differentiation.

'PR' as power differentiation raises our understanding to the level of the ordering power of spirit, expressed as word or logos.

This 'PR' root is seen in the word Prana, which is defined by Vivekanada in his Raja Yoga, as the Infinite manifesting Power of the Universe. This level of Jnana Yoga or knowledge, wisdom, is an important step on the way to liberation (*moksa*), with each letter of the alphabet a part of the sound geometry of the universe and of spirit moving into and out of form.

We are not all gifted with knowledge of Sanskrit or the insight to unlock the spirit of mantra, interestingly a visiting Yogi, told us, that it was not necessary to understand all the words, only to repeat the mantra. There could be some truth in this as mantra with its repetitions (*japa*), channels the thought processes of the mind, and its rhythmic intonation into the space and spirit beyond its formal patterns.

However, it is better to understand the mantra rather than approach it blindly and according to (*Sakta*) philosophy, a mantra is so called because it saves one who meditates on its significance.

It is interesting to note the relationship that exists between Mantra, Yantra and Mudra, as they are all aspects of each other.

Mantra is a specially structured sound symbol.

Yantra is the diagram or pattern formed by the underlying sound pattern and provides a way of looking at reality.

Mudra is the living embodiment of spirit and form and is occasionally seen in the gestures of sacred dance and meditation.

The ultimate purpose of mantra is the Divine marriage between the highest expressions of spirit and the material world. Gordon Smith