

Discourses/Articles

by

Swami Krishnananda

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

MANTRA JAPA

This has reference to the great system of yoga known as Japa – the chanting of a Mantra, which is a principle method of religious practice in the various faiths of the world. While religions vary and differ from one another, in this one particular mode of practice they are almost the same. Every religion recommends and considers as primary the chanting of the Divine Name, repetition of a formula or recitation of what we know as a Mantra. There is the Patra Nostra in the Christian circles, and you must have seen clergymen tying a rosary around their waist even when they are walking about in the public. A Mala is held by a religious man, and a bead rolled by any devotee exclusively dedicated to any particular faith.

The repetition of the Divine Name is known as the Mantra Japa, and such a great gospel as the Bhagavad Gita holds it that among all the spiritual or religious sacrifices or sacraments, Japa should be regarded as the most pre-eminent. In the Shantiparva of the Mahabharata there is a story of one devotee having taken to Japa alone throughout his life, and attained spiritual mastery. It is therefore not for nothing that it is said Japa is the foremost of religious practices. It includes within itself the principles of Svadhyaya (sacred study) and even meditation. According to Patanjali, in one of his Sutras, Svadhyaya includes even chanting of Om, recitation of a Divine Name.

It is a direct approach that we make to the divine principle when we take to Japa Yoga. The Mantras, so-called, are the spiritual formulae into which one gets initiated into by a superior; it's a potent magazine of energy. There are many things which are connected with the practice known as Japa. A Mantra (this is a Sanskrit word) means a talismanic combination of letters which produce an effect of their own when they are articulated in the requisite manner.

It is believed that Mantras are not created – they are only visualized and the seers of a Mantra are known as Mantra Drastas. We do not say they are Mantra Kartas; a Mantra is not manufactured or created by the intellectual operation of an individual. It is visioned and seen as a force that is present, and is not created by any master. There is a seer, known as the rishi of a Mantra. It is the tradition that when we take to the repetition of a Mantra, the rishi should be remembered at the same time, just as when you read a book you also know the author thereof. The thought of the characteristics of the author has very much to do with the zeal with which you will study the book, and the result it produces thereby. The Mantra is not supposed to be suddenly taken into chanting without an obeisance offered to the great master who envisioned this Mantra in his meditations.

The great system of religious practice known as Agama, sometimes known also as Tantra, has it that every Mantra has a deity. The deity is, properly speaking, a

superintending divine principle which works at every juncture of the seer and the seen, the subject and the object, and determines the nature of every kind of perception or knowledge of objects. We are aware of the things of the world on account of the functioning of a deity. The Vedanta Shastra tells us that every limb of the body, every organ of perception, every sense of knowledge is controlled and directed by a deity. We know very well, as we are told in the Shastras, that the presiding deity of the eye is Sun or Surya, and there are other deities for the other senses; which means to say the organs of cognition or perception in the individuals are only external instruments which are pulled by the strings of the intentions of the deity that is above the operations of the senses, and it is not merely above the senses of the individual, but also far beyond the comprehension of this triad forming the perceptual process. The triad consists of the seer, the seeing and the seen. In a way we may say what you call the seeing is the deity, yet it occupies a position which is superior to these processes known as seer, seen and seeing. The three appear to be a single compact process on account of the existence of a deity; so in every act of perception and even thinking, a deity is operating, and a deity is one degree of the descent of God Himself in the realm of creation.

So in the recitation of a Mantra, we are invoking a god. This god, this deity, this principle superintending over the perceptual process is a force, something like a jetting light, with a form compatible with the nature of the perception or awareness at any given moment or degree or level of manifestation.

We have been told many times that there are many gods. There is Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Indra, Gopalakrishna; God knows – endless gods. These are not many gods, really speaking. They are the many forms of control exercised by the one superintending, all-pervading principle in its entry into the process of the degrees of perception and experience through the levels of creation. There is a gradual descent from the Supreme Universality to the lowest of experiences, and in all these levels there is the presence of this principle of Universality, bringing together the two particulars of the seer and the seen object. Whatever be the degree of the descent and whatever be the density of it, even the lowest conceivable one, even there, there is a deity superintending over the process of the seer coming in contact with the seen; and thus in religion we seem to be worshipping many gods, while they are not many gods. Just as a hundred mirrors placed on the walls of this hall may produce a hundred varieties of reflections of a single object placed in the center of the hall, according to the structure of the mirror that is fixed on the walls and the variety of the reflections produced by the different mirrors hung on the wall, cannot be regarded as representing different objects because there is only one object reflected through various mirrors; and they may not be of uniform character because the mirrors may be constructed in different ways – concave, convex, coloured, not coloured, etc., there can even be a broken mirror; according to the nature of the particular structural pattern of the mirror, the reflection will be produced of one single object that is in the center of the hall. Some such thing can be regarded as the explanation of the many gods in religion. They are the variegated reflections of a single entity of the all-pervading universality made visible to our experiences through the mirrors of our personalities which are of variegated types.

Now the Mantra, coming to the point, is a vibration that is produced by this deity, and the vibration is, in a way, inseparable from the existence of the deity, as the light of the Sun can be said to be inseparable from the very being of the Sun himself. The

vibration is an emanation from this deity, and sound is nothing but vibration. If a Mantra can be identified with the form of a particular intonation or the sound produced in the sound box within us, it can, by a stretch of its logical limits, be considered as a vibration finally. A Mantra, therefore, is not merely a sound, but a vibrational process, even as a sound that is projected into the microphone in a broadcasting station gets converted into a vibration through the ether of space and is transmitted to the receiver somewhere else, getting converted once again into a sound, though when it traveled through space it did not travel as sound but only as a vibration which could not, with any stretch of imagination, be identified with the sound that we could hear with our ears. Electricity is nor heat or cold, though it can appear as heat and cold. In a stove it is heat, in a fridge it is cold, and it can be a motion when electricity is connected to a vehicle that moves on a track. Just as electricity is not heat, cold or motion yet it can produce heat, cold or motion, a vibration is not a sound, yet it can appear as a sound – it can appear as colour even.

So the Mantra has a sound form and also a colour form. The colour form is the vision that you have often in deep concentration, and the sound form is what you inaudibly feel inside as the Anahata Shabd. It is not merely sound and colour, it can be even tangible – you can touch. In fact the touch the fingers feel when they come in contact with a solid object is only an electrical repulsion produced, and there is no such thing as real touch. When the fingers come in contact with a hard object like a cot, a table, a desk, etc., an electrical vibration of repulsion of particles is produced. That is a sensation of touch that we feel – the object is really not solid, and therefore the world is not there, another answer to the question that was raised yesterday. The world does not exist; it is only a huge mass of vibrations, and we seem to feel that the world is there really because of the tangibility of the so-called substances of the world, and tangibility is nothing but an electrical vibration that is produced comparable to the weight that you feel suddenly in your hand when you get an electric shock of some 300 volts of power. This can be experimented by you at your own risk, if you like. You touch a high voltage wire, 300 volts or so, not still higher up, you may be burnt to ashes; immediately you will feel a sensation of heavy weight in the hand. I myself had an experience of this kind, so I speak with experience. By mistake I touched some live wire once without knowing that the wire was outside, and it gave such a shock that I felt a heavy stone was hanging on my hand. There was no stone or anything, it was only a feeling in the nerves. The feeling of the nerves can be of a tangible, visible, solid, heavy object, while the object is not there at all. Don't you hit your head against a hard wall in dream, and bleed? Is there a wall really? If you can really bleed and feel a real pain by hitting your head against a wall that is not there, why should you not be under any delusion that the world is there when it is really not there? Well, this is not my subject, I am only digressing as a sort of side-answer to the questions raised by someone yesterday – whether the world is real or not. It is not real, and it is just not there, though it appears to be there because of the vibrations impinging upon our personalities which take the form of colour, sound, tangibility, taste, etc. Even the taste is an illusion – there is no such thing as taste. It is, again, an electrical repulsion produced by the contact of certain taste buds in the tongue when a particular object emanating a particular shape of vibration comes in contact with it, so that the whole universe is electrical vibration, and solid objects do not exist.

The Mantra is similar in its form – a bundle of vibrations. It is a concrescence, a concretisation, a coming together, a pressurised point of a stress of electricity, subtler

than electricity, a Prana Shakti, manifesting itself as a visible object to the percipient consciousness. This is the deity ramifying its rays as vision, as sound, as olfactory experience, as taste, as touch, etc. In deep meditation you will have all these experiences of fragrance of a jasmine flower, of a touch of a soft object, of a taste of honey, and many other things. There is neither honey nor soft object – nothing of the kind. The vibrations become subtler and subtler as we concentrate more and more, deeper and deeper. Then the conditioning factors which separated us from the world outside get thinned out gradually, and we seem to be entering into the nature of things slowly, on account of the concentration we are practising.

The Mantra is a vibration, and the deity of the Mantra is also a vibration of a type, but it is superior in its intensity and subtlety to the two bundles of vibration appearing as the seer and the seen. As waves in the ocean dash against one another, the seer and the seen collide in perception. Every perception or experience in this world is a collision of two bundles of force. We are not persons, we are only heaps of energy, thrust into a particular point of space during intensity of desire arising at a particular point, though nobody can understand why desire arose at all. The Nasadiya Sukta of the Vedas says originally there was a Desire, a Cosmic Will. That is all we can say about the nature of the origin of desire; we are not competent to say anything further about it.

This desire, originally universal and comprehensive in its nature, gets concretised and pinpointed at points of space as individuals, and the One appearing as the many is nothing but the one mass of energy getting pressurised at different points in what is called the space-time continuum. So we are pressure points in space-time; we are not persons seated here. This is again an answer to the question whether the world is real or not – it is not real. Pressure points cannot be regarded as objects, so we are not here as persons; we are bundles of delusion, nothing short.

However, again I come to the point of Mantra Japa after this little digression. When you recite the Mantra, chant a formula, you try to break this pressure point, this concrescence of energy, and act almost in a similar manner as a physicist would when he bombards an atom to release energy. The particular atom that is capable of releasing energy on bombardment is a hidden potentiality, as every one of us also is – it is a sleeping bundle of strength. It sleeps because of a peculiar ego-centre that is present in it, sometimes capable of identification with what scientists call proton or neutron, etc. – a centre of cohesion is present in the atom. That centre of cohesion which brings all the particles around into a single unitary structure is the ego; that is present in an atom, and it is present in us also. We have also a proton inside us, and that is the ego in us, and all the other things that appear around us is a huge movement of the electronic particles constituting our so-called body. If the atom is not real, and it is only a bundle of electric energy, we are also not real, we are just That – then the world also does not exist.

So when you chant the Mantra, you are trying to release the potential energy of your personality by bombarding it with concentration. And the deity releases its blessing, which means to say the superintending, transcendent aspect of the deity becomes an immanent force in our own experience – the transcendent God becomes an immanent presence. That is the vision of God that we have in meditation – transcendence becoming immanence. The deity that is above you becomes an object of cognition and perception in front of you.

This much I can tell you today about the deity of a Mantra, apart from the force generated by the contemplation on the Rishi or the author of the Mantra, whose blessing automatically descends upon you by the very thought of him entertained in your mind. When I deeply think of you, your goodwill emanates towards me; likewise when you think of a great author like Vyasa, Valmiki, Vasishtha, or a great sage, saint, incarnation, and deeply feel the form of his presence, you draw sustenance from the force emanating from him by the very thought of him, because a thought of an object is nothing but a contact established with that object. You draw energy from that object. So that is the great blessing we have by the invocation of the presence of the Rishi of the Mantra, and the contemplation simultaneously on the deity of the Mantra.

Apart from the Rishi and the deity or the Devata, there is another factor in Mantra, which is the Chhandas. The Chhandas is the metre in which the Mantra is composed. There is a science in India which is almost dead these days, called Gana-Shastra. Rhetoricians in the Sanskrit language sometimes are acquainted with it, but these days no one wants to learn Sanskrit. They think it is a dead, old grandmother's language; and very unfortunate is this definition of the value of Sanskrit. There are certain branches of learning called the Vedangas; many of you might not have even heard what these are. One of the branches of this learning connected with the Veda is known as Shiksha or the pronunciation method – the philological system which is the intonation, and the peculiar juxtaposition of the letters of a Mantra when it is chanted. Here you are in the presence of a very important point while you chant a Mantra. You should not repeat a Mantra in a haphazard manner. Though you may be pronouncing the letters in an appreciably satisfactory manner, you may not be able to juxtapose the letters properly. Then they will not produce the proper effect. You know, when you utter a word, you should not have a long pause between one accent and another accent. If the accent is not flowing, there will not be the music of the sound. A musical intonation or a performance is a continuity maintained by the various sounds produced by the strings of the instrument or any other instrument; otherwise there will be a twang of one wire in a particular instrument and another twang after ten minutes – that would not be music. The word Narayanaya – Na, you say and keep quiet. After a few minutes, ra you say; that is not the way of chanting the Mantra. I am giving you the example of what juxtaposition means. There should be the proper duration that is necessary to be maintained in the chanting of the letters of a Mantra, otherwise the chemical effect produced by the coming together of the letters will not be there; and the proportion is very important in the chanting of the Mantra. It is more so in Veda Mantras where the science is more rigid than others.

The Chhandas is therefore the metre of the Mantra, as you have metres in a poem, for instance. If you want to know in what metre the poem is written, you must chant it as would be required by the system of the metre, else it would look like prose and would not be a poem. Thus is the special effect produced by the repetition of a Mantra with the proper juxtaposition of the letters of which it is composed – a third effect produced by it. Rishi, Devata and Chhandas – the fourth effect is the force of your own zeal, ardour and affection for it.

All these put together, together with the grace of the Guru, the power of the will of the Master who has initiated you into the Mantra – all these come together in the production of the required effect in the chanting. So there is a fivefold force present in

any particular Mantra when it is properly recited. Hence, the potency of the Mantra is very obvious. Why should it not contribute to world peace? Certainly it will. But all these conditions are to be fulfilled, otherwise it will be a mechanised routine.

There are other necessary conditions imposed upon the practicant of Japa Yoga, namely, the system of discipline maintained every day. You can chant the Mantra even when you are walking on the road – yes, it is true. But that would be something like having your lunch when you are walking on the road. You can have your lunch and breakfast even strolling, no doubt, but that is not the way of eating, you know very well. You eat by sitting to give respect to the food, and only then the food will be absorbed into your system and will be effective in its intake. Similarly, while you can repeat the Mantra wherever you are and at any time of the day, it has a special effect when it is concentratedly chanted with the discipline characteristic of any central practice. There is no objection to your reciting a Mantra at all times of the day, even when you are taking a bath, but it is essential to devotedly practise it by being seated, especially at the same hour every day. Everything in the universe moves in a cycle; even hunger is manifest in us with a cyclic effect. At a particular hour of the day you feel hungry, and not at every moment of time. If you are used to take your meal at 12:00 noon, you will find that at 12:00 the gastric juices are slowly oozing out, and after two hours they will stop functioning. You will have no hunger after 2:00, because there is the conditioned reflex of everything functioning in the bodily system as well as in the psychic realm; and we have to take advantage of it for reaping the benefit of the practice. It is not desirable that the seat of the practicant should go on changing every day. It should be the same seat as far as possible, because even the seat produces a vibration due to your sitting there. The time is more important than even the seat; because of the cyclic way in which nature works, a particular atmosphere is created at that particular hour. That is why you celebrate the birthday of a person, for instance, on the same day every year and not on some other day. There is a cyclic effect produced astronomically by the activity of nature.

The same time is to be maintained, the same seat, and the same posture. All these contribute to the effect of the chanting. And the same method of concentration also – the same Mantra, and it is not supposed to be changed. Once you are initiated into a particular Mantra by your superior, that has to be stuck to under any circumstance. The Mantra should not be changed, because a change in the Mantra would be like completely changing the diet every day and spoiling the stomach. Even the Guru should not be changed – once you take to one Guru, he's the Guru forever. Even if he may appear to be lesser than another that you have seen sometime later, the original Guru cannot be left behind; he cannot be abandoned as inferior. The same Mantra should continue – then the desired result follows.

Mantras as vibrations can reach distant areas or regions of space. A vibration is not in space and not in time; electric energy is superior to the space-time complex. As you know very well, our scientists tell us today that space-time itself is a mass of energy, so we cannot say that this energy is inside space and time. It is something different and superior to our notions of space-time dimensions. This energy is not a three-dimensional something – at best we may say it is four-dimensional or multi-dimensional. Hence the vibration produced by the repetition of a Mantra is superior to the spatial distance of things, and so you can come in contact with any desired object by

focusing attention on the Mantra by means of the Japa of the same. The vibration is the spirit of the Mantra, and the spirit of anything is transcendent to the spatial form taken by the particular object enshrined in the force.

There is a system, in India especially, known as Purascharana of a Mantra, which has a greater effect than the usual chantings of it. The belief is the Mantra should be chanted as many times as there are letters, in lakhs of numbers. The recitation of a Mantra, as many lakhs of times as there are letters in a Mantra, systematically with the discipline mentioned, is supposed to be a Purascharana; and every Purascharana completed is supposed to break one knot of our bondage. Some say there are three knots, some say there are seven knots, and so on and so forth, whatever they are. The knots which tie us down to earthly experience will be broken open by each Purascharana performed. There is one Sri Rama Sharma Acharya, well known to many of you, who performed twenty-four Gayatri Purascharanas. He lives somewhere in Haridwar, near Saptarishi Ashram. Rama Sharma Acharya is a great saint and sage, and a very unassuming, unostentatious Sadhaka. He told me personally that he has done more than twenty-four Purascharanas of Gayatri. The Gayatri Mantra contains twenty-four letters, and he had to perform twenty-four lakhs of recitation of this lengthy Mantra to complete one Purascharana, and he has completed 24 lakhs – how many years he has taken, God only knows. He must have spent all his time in doing only this. Then you yourself become a Mantra Shakti in yourself. You do not any more become a Sadhaka, or remain as a Sadhaka; you are an embodiment of the deity, a force, a strength, a power, and a fire, as it were. Such is the mystery of a Mantra Japa; and when you write it, naturally you are concentrating on these ideals behind the Mantra.

Why Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and saints of this kind insisted on the writing of the Mantra, in addition to the chanting of it as a Japa, is because while in mere chanting the mind can wander here and there. In writing there is a lesser chance of the mind wandering, because you have to write. Therefore the mind has to be concentrating on the formation of the letters, as there is a compulsion to concentrate in a more intense degree in writing the Mantra than while merely chanting, especially mentally. Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj has prescribed writing of a Mantra as a very potent method of Sadhana. So, under the circumstances of these implications of the recitation of a Mantra, either verbally, mentally, or in writing, we may safely say that a Mantra chanted, whether in the mind or by the formation of a sound, and even in writing, will have the desired effect. It shall bring about peace of mind within oneself and create in oneself a spiritual force, and certainly contribute to world peace. Hari Om Tat Sat.

*Om purnam adah, purnam idam,
purnat purnam udacyate;
purnasya purnam adaya
purnam evava'sisyate.
Om Santih! Santih! Santih!*

That is Full; this is full. From the Full does the Full proceed. After the coming of the Full from the Full, the Full alone remains.

Om Peace! Peace! Peace!