

Mantra Japa



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Introduction

During the course of our daily worship, we invite and invoke the Lord's presence in the form of an image through divine prayer. Subsequently, offer a sip of water for rinsing the mouth with and for washing His feet, extol Him by chanting sacred texts and singing His glories, offer food (comprising fruits, milk, curd and specially prepared delicacies) befitting the occasion. Towards the end of the prayer, we symbolically re-position Him back to His divine abode. Repeating divine names, chanting and singing His glories, are essential parts of worship.

'Repeating' implies silently uttering the Lord's divine names (Namas).

In the popular Vishnu Sahasra Nama, it is said

ऋग्यजुस्साम लक्षणो मन्त्रः
āgyajussāma lakṣṇāḥ mantraḥ

One who manifests as Rig Yajus and Sama Mantras

The Lord Himself manifests in the form of Mantras, the sacred hymns.

मननात् त्रायते इति मन्त्रः
mananāt trāyate iti mantraḥ

'Mantra' is that which always protects the person who chants it.

Although a 'Mantra' outwardly appears to be a mere collection of names, phrases and syllables, it forms a protective shield for the person who chants it aloud or repeats silently. From this we can understand its power and glory.

मन्त्रबोध्यत्वाद्वा मन्त्रः

mantrabodhyatvädvä mantraù

The one who is known through the mantra.

'Mantra' is a name for Narayana, since He is realized through Mantra.

Repetition of 'Mantra':

Repeatedly uttering the divine name of the Lord (or deity in various manifestations) in the form of a 'Mantra' is called 'Mantra Japa'.

Significance of 'Mantra Japa':

The mind serves as an instrument (or means) by which we are enabled to get the knowledge concerning different matters and experience the pleasure and pain from them every day.

Mind is an invaluable gift or boon given by the Lord; but, its intrinsic nature is that it is always wavering. Even though it may be immersed in joy one moment, it is overpowered by sorrow the next moment. If it is filled with love or affection one moment, the next moment it gets agitated by hatred or disgust. Such is the nature of the mind.

However, to carry out any task, single – minded concentration is essential. In an individual whose mind is wavering (and hence lacks focus) concentration is suppressed (diminished) and as a result, his skill in executing a task is affected. So, the person is unable to succeed in his endeavors.

Therefore, a focused mind with a single – pointed concentration is necessary for a

person. The fact that such a concentrated mind is essential for attaining self-knowledge, which is the ultimate goal of human life. This has been made evident by this verse of Kathopanishad:

मनसैवेदमाप्तव्यं नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन

manasaivedamäptavyaà neha nänästi kiçcana

Kathopanishad 2.1.11

meaning "you can attain self-knowledge only by a focused mind".

In the same way, Lord Krishna has declared in the Bhagavad Gita that the mind is a person's friend as well as foe.

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः

ätmaiva hyätmano bandhurätmaiva ripurätmanaù

B.G.6.5

In the verse quoted above, 'Atma' means 'mind'.

A well-controlled mind will assist a spiritual seeker whose aim is liberation or Moksha.

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मन जितः

bandhurätmätmanastasya yenaätmaivätmana jitaù

B.G.6.6

For a person who has controlled his mind (and sense organs), the same mind (and the senses) will assist him to attain liberation.

So, saint Thyagaraja poses this question to the mind in his composition:

**"ManasuNilpa Shakti Leka Potey
MadhuraGantaVirulaPoojemiJetunu"**

Therefore, a concentrated mind is highly essential. However, it is not so easy to control the mind. Controlling the mind is as difficult as preventing the flame of a lamp placed in wind from flickering. Arjuna also expresses to Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita:

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम् ।
तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥
caicalaa hi manaù kãñëa pramãthi balavaddãðham
tasyãhaa nigrahaa manye vãyoriva suduñkaram
B.G.6.34

It is as difficult to control the mind as it is to control the wind.

We can see our reflection clearly in a pond with still water; if the water gets disturbed and the reflection is not seen clearly. Similarly, an elephant's trunk

swaying without staying still. The same trunk will stop moving if one gives a fruit. The mind also behaves in the same way. It is always unsteady and wavering, filled with some thought or the other. So, if one wishes to control a wavering mind and focus it to achieve concentration, it must be provided with something to hold on to. The chanting of a 'mantra' facilitates such holding. A pure mind endowed with quick grasping power is able to effortlessly understand subtle subject matters. Since our seers (Rishis) were endowed with a sharp and concentrating mind, they could receive the Vedic hymns, from the Lord and has been imparting all along to the humanity, in the form of Guru-Sishya Parampara.

This is expounded in the Kathopanishad by this verse:

दृश्यते त्वग्रयया बुद्ध्या सुक्ष्मया सुक्ष्म दर्शिभिः
dãcyate tvagrayayã buddhyã sukñmayã sukñma darçibhiù
Kathopanishad 1.3.12

Only with subtle intellect, endowed with sharp concentration can attain self-knowledge.

यन्मनसा न मनुते

yanmanasã na manute

A pure mind with concentration alone can empower oneself to attain liberation. On the contrary, an unsteady mind is an obstruction for a spiritual seeker.

So, 'MantraJapa' is very essential for controlling and purifying the mind.

यज्ञानां जपयज्ञोऽस्मि

yajñanãa japayajno'smi

Among all types of worship (Yajnas), Japa is supreme. Lord Krishna has highlighted the supremacy of Mantra Japa by declaring that "Mantra Japa is Myself".

Mantra Japa provides not only healthy mind but also healthy physique. It removes our sins and adds virtues (Punya). The obstacles in our life journey will disappear. We get stability of mind.

'Mantra Japa' is an invaluable aid for spiritual progress; so, it is necessary for everyone. It results in getting the appearance (Darshan) of one's favorite deity (IshtaDevata).

Prahlada, Anjaneya, Dhruva, Saint Thyagaraja, Meera Bai and several such great devotees could get the 'Darshan' of their favorite deity.

So, 'Mantra Japa' is highly beneficial to a spiritual seeker.

The Method of Mantra Japa:

'Mantra Japa' can be done by holding a string of beads (Japa Mala) such as 'Tulasi', 'Rudraksha' or crystal, or by counting with fingers.

We get more benefit if we take the mantra in a traditional way – that is, getting it imparted by a qualified spiritual Acharya or 'Guru' (Which is termed as 'Mantra Deeksha').

By constantly and continuously chanting, the 'Japa' fills up the mind. Consequently, it purifies the mind and always leads to spiritual progress. We can recall that our elders were engaged in Japa, holding a rosary, most of the time. A Japa

done for years together tantamount to a penance.

Significance of 'Mantra Japa'

जकारो जन्म विच्छेदः पकारः पापानाशनः ।
जन्मपापहरो यस्मात् तस्माज्जप इति स्मृताः ॥

jakāro janma vichedaḥ pakāraḥ pāpānaśanaḥ ।
janmapāpaharo yasmāt tasmājjapa iti smṛtāḥ ॥

Japa puts an end to rebirth. How is it possible? By doing Japa, accumulated merits and demerits of actions (Punya and Papa), gets annulled. 'Punya' and 'Papa' are the cause of rebirth. Since these are erased through Japa, there is no possibility of rebirth.

As a first step, the spiritual seeker must identify himself with the Lord. It is possible that while chanting the name of one deity,

another deity form may arise in the mind. Sometimes, the mind may also get distracted by the thoughts about family members and others. As a result the seeker instead of remaining as a devotee, but comes down to the status of an individual, with worldly bonds. This has been invariably, the experience of the seeker.

Therefore, we must detach ourselves from worldly attachments during the course of 'Mantra Japa'. Even though, thoughts regarding worldly matters arise again and again, we must tirelessly, draw the mind back and focus it on to Japa. Consequently, one would become a staunch devotee and further increase the intensity of the 'Mantra Japa'.

The moment we think of sage Narada, Lord Narayana come to our mind. In the

same way, when we think of Prahlada, SrimanNarayana comes to our mind. Prahlada commenced chanting Narayana Mantra even while he was in his mother's womb; he continued his unflinching devotion without fear despite several unbearable obstacles and threats meted out by his own father, HiranyaKasipu. Thyagaraja and Mira Bai also faced many obstacles. Even then, there was not an iota of reduction in their devotion. They never gave up the practice of 'Mantra Japa'. When we remember such great devotees, our enthusiasm gets renewed.

So, the Mantra which we chant must fill up every cell of our body.

Types of 'Mantra Japa'

Japa is of three types:

1. Loud (Uchcha Japa)
 2. Whisper (Manda or Upamsu Japa) and
 3. Mental (Manasikajapa)
1. 'Uchcha Japa' means repeating the Mantra loudly, which is audible to others. If the mind is distracted, this mode of Japa (Uchcha Japa) is prescribed.
 2. 'Manda Japa' means chanting in a low tone wherein the seeker only is able to hear the 'Mantra'.

These two types are verbal Japa with sound being the predominant.

3. 'Mental (Manasika) Japa' means the devotee repeats the mantra silently.

कायावाङ्मनः कार्यमुत्तमम् पूजनं जपश्चिन्तनं क्रमात् ।
 kāyāvāṁmanaḥ kāryamuttamam pūjanaḥ
 japaścintanaḥ kramāt ।

"Mental Japa is superior to verbal Japa and is more powerful" – this is stated by Ramana Maharishi in UpadesaSaram.

In this practice of 'Mantra Japa', the devotee must have full faith in the mantra.

मन्त्रे तीर्थे द्विजे देवे दैवज्ञे भेषजे गुरौ ।
 यादृशी भावना यस्य सिद्धिर्भवति तादृशी ॥

mantra térthe dvije deve daivajñe bheñaje gurau ।
 yādāṣé bhāvanā yasya siddhirbhavati tādāṣé ॥

i.e., the benefit we get is in proportion to the faith we keep on the following:

1. Mantra - One should have firm and full faith in the efficacy of the Mantra imparted by a Guru and chant it with sincerity.
2. Teertha – One should have devotion, faith and belief regarding the glory of the places of pilgrimage such as Kashi, Rameswaram and Haridwar. Then only the benefit of visiting the holy places will be effective.
3. Dwija (A Priest) – we must trust the priests, who conducts the rituals. We should have firm conviction that the rituals performed under the priest's supervision have no defects or deficiency, so that it will give us the full benefit.
4. Deity – Towards any deity we should have full faith and devotion. Chanting

the mantra of a deity or worshipping the idol of a deity as laid down by our religious texts, such as 'Puranas, 'Itihasas', 'Saiva Agama' and 'Vaishnava Agama' should only be considered, which will yield superior benefits for our well-being.

There are a number of traditional mantras, such as,

Om Sri MahaGanapathayeNamaha
 Om NamahShivaya
 Om NamaNarayanaya
 Om NamobhagavateyVasudevaaya
 Om RamayaNamaha
 Om Sri DurgayaiNamaha
 Om Sri MahalakshmyaiNamaha
 Om Sri SaraswatyaiNamaha
 Om Sri HanumateyNamaha
 Om Sri KrishnayaNamaha

and Gayatri Mantra, Mrityunjaya Mantra etc.

"Om NamobhagavateyVasudevaya" is known as 'Dwadasakshara Mantra'.

Who is implied by 'Vasudeva'?

वसन्ति अस्मिन् भूतानि इति वासुः

vasanti asmin bhütāni iti vāsuh

दीव्यति स्वयं प्रकाशते इति देवः

dévyati svayaè prakāçate iti devaù

वासुः च असौ देवः च वासुदेवः

vāsuh ca asau devaù ca vāsudevau

It means 'Vasudeva is one who dwells and shines as Atma', in all beings. Therefore, we must do the japa on Vasudeva

It means 'Vasudeva is one who shines as Atma, the consciousness in all beings;

i.e., in all Jeevas, we must do the Japa of Vasudeva. In the same way, in the 'PanchaksharaMantra' ('Om Namah Shivaya'), 'Shiva' is the 'embodiment of auspiciousness'. Therefore, doing the Japa of traditional Mantras, which are meaningful, will lead to spiritual progress.

5. Daivagnya (astrologer) - We must have full faith and belief on the predictions of the astrologer.
6. Bheshajam(Medicine) – Trust on the medicine prescribed by the physician and adhering to it is essential. Our elders used to do a Mantra Japa prior to taking medicines and remembering the Lord at that instant. You may wonder what a devout life they led!
7. Spiritual Teacher (Guru) – Serving a Guru with utmost faith and devotion,

one must seek spiritual knowledge. The Mantra imparted by a Guru must be chanted with total devotion and sincerity. The Mantra should not be changed at any time. Such a Japa done with devotion and sincerity turns out to be powerful and intensify the value. It speaks to the devotee and does wonders, towards fulfillment of his wishes.

हरे राम हरे राम राम राम हरे हरे ।
हरे कृष्ण हरे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हरे हरे । ।

hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare ।
hare kãñëa hare kãñëa kãñëa kãñëa hare hare ॥

This Mantra occurs in 'Kali Santaranopanishad' and is known as 'Taraka Mantra'. 'TarayatiItiTarakam' - it helps in crossing the ocean of 'Samsara'.

That is why Saint Bhakta Rama Das exuberantly sang with joy, "Taraka Mantra is got by one seeking it; oh, how fortunate am I!" In the same way, Saint Thyagaraja sang "Oh mind! Rama Nama is the life-saving Mantra; may you drink and revel in that!"

Such is the glory of a 'Mantra'.

Benefits of Mantra Japa

There are many benefits of Mantra Japa.

- ❖ Generally, there are differences based on community, caste, religion, sects and gender with regard to religious practices such as forms of worship and penance. However, Mantra Japa is devoid of such differences. Anyone can

adopt and chant a particular Mantra, irrespective of differences.

- ❖ In the practice of 'Mantra Japa' there are no specific injunctions like 'do's and don'ts'. In this context, recall that, in performance of Vedic rituals, one should not transgress the vedic injunctions.

Any religious practice that is performed without any selfish motive, expecting no personal gain, need not have any such injunctions regarding the place or time etc. So 'Mantra Japa' can be done in any place or at any time.

'Mantra Japa' means to attain 'Liberation (Moksha)'.

- ❖ Performance of religious rites, such as Pooja, vows, etc. involves expenditure

expense. But 'Mantra Japa' is inexpensive.

Therefore, 'Mantra Japa' is the practice within everyone's reach that is an aid to develop devotion to Lord and to further attain Moksha. So, one must practice 'Mantra Japa'. Even if one might have done the 'Mantra Japa' for a long time, one may continue to do, for the welfare of the universal harmony.

Even for 'Sanyasis', 'Omkaara' Japa is prescribed.

Even if a 'Sanyasi' might have given up all other religious observances, they never give up the practice of 'Omkaara mantra Japa'; what to say about a 'Grihasta'?

People are subjected to the tide of various diverse activities. They should obtain purity of mind through 'Mantra Japa' which ultimately leads them to the feet of a Guru. Subsequently, by systematic study of scriptures, they can attain 'liberation' or 'Moksha' soon.

Thus, everyone must know the greatness and necessity of 'Mantra Japa' and take a resolve to practice the same. Consequently, 'liberation' is attainable expeditiously. This is the unique benefit which can be obtained only through human birth.

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