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The Inner Power of Mantras

with Corrine Champigny

by Julia Griffin

Julia: Can you begin by telling about your work with mantras and where it has taken you in your life?

Corrine: I've always loved music, and I started singing professionally at seventeen. I went to Nashville because I wanted to be a star. I started meditating because I had a really bad stomach ulcer. Very soon after that, the ulcer went completely away. I was so impressed that I took yoga classes to study mantras.

Meditation with mantras caused me to focus on my inner life as opposed to my outer life. I realized it was only my ego that wanted to be a star. What I really wanted was to use my voice to heal and help others. I stopped singing completely for several years, to keep my ego in check. I started using my voice as a tool to serve God.

I took a meditation class with Depak Chopra, and he found out that I could sing (I tried to hide it, but he found out). He asked me to sing for him, and I've worked for the past five years teaching yoga and mantras and singing at seminars

at his institute in San Diego. I also write chants now, and even if I just sing a pop song, the spirituality is still there. My intent is to serve.

Julia: What is a mantra?

Corrine: Mantra is a Sanskrit word. The mantras come from the Vedas and were written 5,000 years ago. The Vedas are thought to be much older, having been given to us 25,000 years ago. It is believed that Enlightened Beings wrote the Vedas, and these are the source of mantras.

"Man" means mind and "tra" means instrument or tool, so "mantra" literally means instrument of the mind. Mantra Yoga means "union by voice or sound," and refers to the rhythmic repetition of mantras. Mantras are tools for focusing — a taxicab to take you where you want to go. When the mind is focused on a mantra, it becomes quiet, and this takes us to the soul. Eventually, the sound merges with God, and only the meditation or fixation of the mind remains. This is the way in which the mantra is used as an instrument of the mind.

Julia: Do other religions have mantras?

Corrine: Every religion has songs or chants. While they may not have the vibratory quality of the Vedic mantras, they are mantras nonetheless. The name and object are inseparable, so when you think of the name of Christ or Krishna, the image comes to mind with the sound. There are mantras for Tibetans, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians.

Julia: Can you tell me more about the vibratory rates of mantras?

Corrine: Sanskrit is a vibration language. This means that contained in any Sanskrit sound is the potential to manifest into form. The vibratory patterns that are created by chanting mantras alter the physicality of our world. These vibratory patterns are called "Sakti."

If a group of people begins to meditate and chant OM, and there is a dish of sugar or salt, then the salt or sugar will take on the shape of that sound — not the symbol of OM, which looks like a three (3), and not the letters, but the symbolic representation of the meaning. It would form a yantra or mandala.

Julia: Can you describe a yantra?

Corrine: Yantras are geometric drawings that make visible the patterns of sound energy in a mantra. They are the pictorial, geometric representations of the energies of mantras. Each yantra has its own visible power pattern, and when combined with mantra, it builds form. Eventually, one transcends the yantra-mantra and perceives the energy behind it.

"Yan" refers to conceptualizing, so the yantra is a mental and somewhat physical representation of energy.

Julia: I understand that there are several different parts of mantras. Can you tell us about this?

Corrine: Yes, a mantra has six parts. The first is Rishi, the person to whom it was revealed and who gave the mantra to the world.

The mantra also has a meter, or Chhandas. This is the inflection or the tone of the voice, and it comes naturally as the mantra is repeated over and over. The voice finds its tone.

The Devata, or supernatural being, gives its power of informing or identifying energy.

The Bija is the seed. This is the important word or series of words that conveys a special power to the mantra.

The Sakti is the vibratory energy pattern.

Finally, there is the Kilaka, or pin. When the pin is taken from the mantra, the hidden energy or secret to consciousness is revealed.*

Julia: How do mantras affect the mind?

Corrine: Mantras quieten the mind. All the thoughts that we repeat in our mind have vibrations, even though we are not hearing them out loud. Thoughts have an effect, and this effect is not necessarily always positive, but when we repeat a mantra, it teaches the mind to calm down and let go. You go beyond the mind and into silence.

When the mind wanders, the mantra brings it back. And as the mantra teaches the mind to distance itself from distraction, the distractions become smaller and less frequent. First, one thought dissolves, then another. And you learn to hold that consciousness. When you learn to hold the consciousness, you begin to remember who you truly are.

A mantra is like a new, more powerful antenna on your television. By using the mantra, you are tuning to a channel you could not access before.

Julia: What are some of the changes in consciousness that mantra meditation can bring about?

Corrine: A major change is that we focus on the inner self. We learn to forget about the outer self and just be. An analogy is to think of the waves in a great ocean. When there is a storm, the waves are huge. The ocean forgets that it is an ocean. It thinks it is the huge, angry, dramatic waves. When the storm is over, the ocean is calm. It is beautiful and smooth. Then the ocean feels its wholeness. All of its parts feel at one. This is what meditation with mantras does to our consciousness. We think we are the waves of fear or anger or jealousy that assault our minds. When we can quiet the mind, we become like the ocean experiencing the beauty and serenity of itself. We become our souls. Then we *are* the ocean.

Julia: How do the sounds in a mantra impact our physical world?

Corrine: I can give you an example. There are groups of people who go all over the world and chant. I went with a group of six thousand people to Washington, DC, and we meditated eight hours a day for two months. The crime rate was decreased by 35 percent. There are many groups who do this in many places. You don't hear about them, but their work profoundly affects our world.

Julia: I have read that mantras can be used for many things — to create wealth, to mitigate karma, to heal the physical body. Is this true?

Corrine: There are many mantras that may be used for many things. Intention, or thinking of what you want while meditating, is really the key. Your intention will bring you to what you want.

Divine words are encased within the sound of the mantra. The names of the deities can be used to bring about a manifestation of the energies associated with that deity. This creates a sound form that holds the God energies as the mantra is repeated. The power comes through sounds contained in the mantra.

Some mantras come from the names of the specific deities. These include Lord Shiva and his wife, Shakti. He represents potential, and she represents creativity. The goddess Lakshmi is for abundance or money.

The names of deities may be used in chants. A chant for peace and love using Lord Shiva's name is "Om Namah Shivaya." Any of the other deities' names could be substituted.

Julia: Can you tell me about mantras for the chakras?

Corrine: I made a chakra chant CD, and this is probably the

most popular of my CDs. When you listen to it or chant for a few minutes you will feel the difference.

There are different seed mantras for each chakra. The seed mantras balance the energy of the chakras. One way of viewing this is to think of a room of clocks. When a room is full of clocks, the clocks automatically synchronize themselves and tick together. This is what the seed mantras do for the chakras.

Julia: What are the seed mantras for the chakras and how do they work?

Corrine: All of these mantras work for different outcomes, if that's how you want to focus. There are different energies for each chakra, and you can focus on the particular energy you want in your life. You can concentrate on any of these seed mantras, but the Heart is the one you should work on if you have only a little time. The Heart acts as the balance for the entire body and system. Really, everything comes from the Heart. The Heart connects all of the chakras.

It takes a minimum of five minutes of chanting per chakra to bring it into balance. Here are mantras for each of them:

1. Root chakra: Red, Center of Physical Vitality, Stability — LAM.
2. Seat of the soul: Orange Personal Energy & Sex — VAM.
3. Solar plexus: Yellow, Personal Power — RAM.
4. Heart: Green, Love, Compassion — YUM.
5. Throat: Blue, Creative Consciousness — HUM.
6. Third Eye: Violet, Intuition — OM.
7. Crown: White, Reception of God's Energy — AUM.

Julia: Do you feel that difficult situations in our lives can be healed or mitigated through chanting? And if so, how does this happen?

Corrine: Absolutely. Situations are difficult because we react when someone pushes into an old wound. We begin

to play tapes or think thoughts or see pictures that bring up and intensify the hurt. Meditation with mantra is like cleaning the computer screen of these picture and words.

What we don't understand is that our minds are like the computer. They can be filled up with all kinds of garbage, but just because it's on the screen doesn't mean that it is real. You can always erase what's there or "put in a new hard drive." When you clean the screen, there is room for the true self. You can hold a picture of happiness and erase the picture of sadness.

Breathing out the pain and breathing in Love is another very effective technique for dealing with difficult situations.

Julia: What mantras do you recommend for someone who wants to begin chanting?

Corrine: AUM. Because that's like White Light. It contains all of the colors in the spectrum, all of the chakras. Everything is in AUM. It's considered the most powerful chant of all.

Also, you might try YUM, the seed mantra for the heart chakra.

Julia: How many times should a mantra be repeated or for how long?

Corrine: The mantras should be chanted for fifteen minutes twice each day. We repeat mantras during the day because it is like dyeing a cloth. You dip the cloth in bright yellow dye, but after you wash it a few times, it gets pale. So you dip it back in the dye, and now it's brightly colored again.

This is like our consciousness. We meditate for a while, and our consciousness becomes clear. The thoughts cease. But then seven or eight hours later, the clarity of consciousness has faded and the thoughts have begun to reassert themselves.

Julia: Are you speaking of chanting out loud, or silently?

Corrine: Both. The sounds set up a vibration when spoken aloud, but they also set up the vibration in the mind when spoken silently. The mind is restless, so it is useful to repeat the mantra verbally or in a whisper. But whether it's verbal or whispered or silent, the mantra should be spoken with feeling.

Julia: Do you visualize the yantras while you meditate?

Corrine: No. Some people do, but I don't. I just focus on the words. I'm not very visual. However, when I was taking yoga for twelve hours a day, I did see the yantras before I slept and when I was dreaming.

I don't necessarily recommend trying to see yantras or colors when chanting. This is something that should come naturally or not at all. The mantras still work. On the other hand, the symbols or yantras are something that we all know in our superconscious and have forgotten. If they come up by themselves in meditation, then we should focus on them.

Julia: Is there a particular time that is best to recite mantras?

Corrine: It is best to recite mantras in the morning and before the sun goes down.

Also, when one comes home from work is a very good time to meditate. This is taking in divine energy, and it provides a rest for the body. It's like starting all over again. You will feel rested and energized throughout the evening. Many people tell me that they meditate right before they go to sleep, but this brings energy in and can lead to insomnia.

Julia: How long does it take to see a substantial change from practicing mantra yoga?

Corrine: No one can predict how long that will take — it can

be short or long or even instantaneous.

For some people, it can take a long time. They must totally focus and study for a long period of time while remaining faithful to the practice. For others, it can happen very rapidly. It depends on the person and also on karma. Ultimately, the Vedas teach that it is God's grace that enlightens us. Nothing takes us to God but grace itself.

Julia: If you wanted to immerse yourself in knowledge about mantras or really learn about it, what would be the best way to start? Are there books you would recommend?

Corrine: I would say start with a qualified yoga teacher, because they use effective methods for introducing mantras and symbols. You can read books or listen to CDs of chants, but the progression will be more rapid with a teacher.

Julia: Is there anything else you want to say about mantras?

Corrine: There is bliss in every moment. Chants and mantras are a method of accessing it. When we can transcend our emotions and our own life, we become present. When we are present and have our full attention in the moment, then we feel only Love.

That is bliss. It's what life is really about.



Corrine Champigny is a teacher, singer and songwriter who uses music for healing. She also works with Depak Chopra who characterized her as having "the voice of an angel."

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*See SivanandaDLHQ.org.

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