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## THE POWER OF MANTRA

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### Introduction

For thousands of years, in a wide range of cultural traditions, people have been using sounds in a variety of ways to contribute to health and well-being. There are traditional songs, chants and music to accompany many social activities. In some indigenous tribes, virtually every activity is preceded by a ceremonial chant, whether it is hunting, gathering or preparing food, going to war, marriage or any type of celebration. These chants help to prepare the participants mentally, physically and spiritually, for the coming event. In this article we will focus on one aspect of this common practice, the use of certain vocalized 'power sounds' that we will call 'mantras.' We will look at information about mantras and discuss some of the ways that they can affect human consciousness.

### Vibrational meaning

What are mantras? Why do they have such strong capacity to affect us? To answer these questions we must first acknowledge that sound in general has a powerful effect on human consciousness. Some sounds, such as nails on a blackboard, are irritating, while other sounds, such as a gently babbling brook, sooth us. For the most part, all humans tend to react to these sounds similarly, although there may be some variation as to which sounds affect which people. Several scientists and researchers have tested the idea that sounds can be used to affect human health. French scientist, Dr. Alfred Tomatis (1992), has developed techniques using high frequency sound to treat a wide variety of medical conditions. Robert Monroe (1994) of the Monroe Institute has used sound to balance the hemispheres of the brain. Laurel Elizabeth Keyes (1979) has worked with the healing potential of the human voice. Dr. Jeffrey Thompson (2004) uses sonic wave forms to induce Alpha and Theta brainwaves. Dr. Robert C. Beck (1992) and Tom Kenyon (1994) of Acoustic Brain Research and others have investigated sound's capacity to affect brain states in a variety of ways. .

It may be useful to think of a sound as a 'relationship of frequencies..' Every single, solitary sound is a vibration with a specific frequency. Most of the sounds we hear consist of several sounds combined, or a collection of frequencies. It is the way that these frequencies relate to each other that determines the way they affect human consciousness. With noise or discordant sound, the frequencies have no mathematical relationship with each other. In music, the

frequencies (the notes) relate to each other. They are in harmony with each other and are more naturally pleasing to the ear.

A good way to understand a mantra's power is to look at the way a chord affects us in music. A major chord, which is a harmonic relationship of three frequencies or notes, has a built-in emotional quality, an inherent way of affecting human consciousness. It makes us feel a certain way. A minor chord, which is a different harmonic relationship of three notes, has a completely different emotional quality than the major chord. It affects us completely differently. Humans seem to recognize and react to these sounds in a similar way. It is built-in. We don't know why it affects us this way – it just does.

Similarly, a mantra is a collection of sounds, a relationship of frequencies. Every mantra has an innate ability to affect human consciousness. Said another way, each sound and each syllable has a natural, inherent power. Certain combinations of these sounds have a 'vibrational meaning,' a vibratory quality that relates to aspects of humanity/divinity. Repeated exposure to these sounds can bring about a shift in human consciousness, bringing that consciousness into harmony with that vibratory quality. A mantra has a built-in power to balance energy, to change our beliefs, to change the way we act, think and feel. We're not sure exactly how it works - it just does.

I believe that some ancient root languages, such as Hebrew and Sanskrit, and some indigenous languages were built upon this realization, so that the vibrational meaning of certain sounds contributed to the literal meaning of words. It seems likely that, back when human consciousness was more right-brained and intuitive, the language was developed in such a way that there was a truer connection between the vibrational meaning and the literal meaning of a 'word.' Our modern languages, developed during a time when human consciousness was more left-brained and less intuitive, seem less connected in this vibrational way.

Some mantras evolved to become the names of deities. In other words, the sounds that represented a certain set of human/divine qualities were eventually assigned a divine persona, and the sound became the name of that persona, that deity. For example, the relationship of frequencies in the word *kali*, contains a certain power/meaning or set of characteristics. This set of characteristics was eventually assigned to a persona, a goddess named Kali. She is usually associated with the cycles of birth and death – creation and destruction. She can be invoked for a variety of related purposes. For example, she can be called upon to help someone destroy negative behavior patterns and to create positive replacements for these behaviors. When we use the name of a deity in a mantra, we are not just invoking the image of that deity, we are invoking the power inherent in the sounds that make up the name of the deity. I believe that, along with other powers, such as the power of intention, change is facilitated by the vibratory force of the sound, 'kali.'

These deity names and mantras are believed, in many traditions, to have power even when they are in the form of a thought. In other words, the name itself has been identified as carrying power. It appears likely that the actual sound in pronouncing the name may lend it further power, although the written name and a mental focus on the name are also said to carry power. If we broaden our standard definition of the word 'sound,' we can view a thought to be a type of sound in that it is also a vibratory expression. Some traditions believe that a thought-form is like an electromagnetic transmission.

It is interesting that similar sounds are seen in the names of deities from different cultures and religious traditions. For example, the sound *ra* or *ram* appears in many contexts. Anyone who possessed the secrets of 'ram,' is said to possess 'the highest expression of cosmic knowingness.' The original name of Abraham was 'Abram,' which means 'he who has Ram.' This

root can be seen in several names for divinity, such as Rama (India/Tibet), Ra and Ramtha (Egypt), and Aram (Celtic).

In the Ancient Hebrew traditions, the name of God – Jehovah, derived from the name Yahweh (sometimes pronounced Yahveh). It is thought that this name originally came from a set of four vowel sounds, *ee, ah, oo, eh*. These sounds were called the *Tetragrammaton* and were said to have great power. At a point in their history when the patriarchy/priesthood sought to control all direct connection to divinity, it was forbidden for the common Hebrews to use this name and they were told to use the word 'Adonai' to refer to God. It is interesting that in overtone singing one uses these same vowel sounds to get different harmonic overtones.

There is no question that sound is a powerful force. It has always been associated with 'magick' – the art of creating our reality with our will, with the creative power of consciousness. Two words associated with magic are 'incantation' and 'enchantment.' Within these words we can see the root 'chant.' By the effective use of mantras we can learn to effectively use the power of consciousness – to control that creative force and thus control the reality of our lives.

Science has made some interesting observations related to the power of consciousness and sound and their capacity to affect material, physical change. Over the past hundred years, quantum physics has alluded to this power of intentionality and will (although not in connection with sound). Physicists now feel that the intention of the experimenter must be considered a factor that helps determine the outcome of the experiment. The Global Consciousness Project spearheaded by Dr. Roger Nelson out of Princeton University conducted experiments with Random Events Generators (REGs), computers that are the equivalent of automatic coin flippers. These experiments have demonstrated the effects of conscious intent on REGs (Nelson, 1998). The explorations of Dr. Masaru Emoto and others have also demonstrated this phenomenon. Emoto has shown that conscious intention can affect the physical form of water crystals (Emoto 2005).

Science has also shown relationships between sound and matter. Back in the 1800's Ernst Chladni, and more recently Hans Jenny performed experiments, some of which involve sand on a thin sheet of metal or dust particles floating in suspension. When the vibration of sound was applied, the particles arranged themselves into a pattern. Jenny's branch of science, known as Cymatics, has demonstrated the relationship between form and vibration, showing that vibration introduces order to a random collection of particles (Jenny, 1967).

A variety of mystical traditions have much to say about the creative power of sound and its association with consciousness. The following quote is from the Hindu Vedas: "In the beginning was Brahman with whom was the Word. And the Word is Brahman." This passage appears to refer to the idea that sound, here represented by 'Word' or *vaikhari* (Sanskrit), is a major component of creation. How similar this quote is to the opening lines of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Again, if we broaden our definition of the word 'sound' to mean vibration, then ancient mysticism can be seen to be in accord with quantum physics and string theory. These theories contend that everything in the universe is a manifestation of vibrating energy.

There are several allusions in the Bible to the power of sound, including its use in bringing down the walls of Jericho. According to the ancient Egyptians, Thoth created the universe with the power of his voice. In ancient Greece, as far back as 600 BC, Pythagoras taught of the power of sound and its ability to affect us. The Hopi Indians tell of the Spider Woman who creates the world by singing the Song of Creation. The Maya, the Aztec and many other indigenous cultures have similar creation stories. Clearly, the idea that sound is strongly linked to the creative process is widespread among cultures throughout history.

The ancient mystics assert that we create our reality at all times. The following quote is from the Buddhist Dharmapada: “*We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world*”.

### **Sanskrit – a magic language**

We have considered the idea that all sounds have an inherent power or meaning – a built in capacity to affect human consciousness. We can refer to this capacity as the sound’s ‘vibrational meaning.’ Sanskrit is one of our most ancient root languages, one that seems to have retained a high degree of connection between the literal meaning and the vibrational meaning of its words. It is sometimes referred to as a ‘science of sound.’ In fact, Sanskrit is a remarkable language in many ways.

Sanskrit is said to be between 5,000 and 7,000 years old. It was developed in the Indian sub-continent and passed from generation to generation in oral traditions for millennia before it made an appearance in written form. The oldest example of written Sanskrit is thought to be the Rig Veda, a key Hindu text written about 1,700 BC. The grammar and phonology of this ancient tongue was recorded in great detail in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC by an Indian linguist/grammarian named Panini.

Sanskrit heavily influenced many of the languages that followed. It is the earliest form of Indo-Aryan language and has had a key influence on most modern Asian languages. It is also the oldest Indo-European language, heavily influencing later root languages such as Latin and Greek, which in turn form the basis of much of today’s European languages. For instance, this can be seen in the Sanskrit words for mother – *matr*, and father – *pitr*.

Referred to as *deva-bh\_s*, meaning ‘language of the gods,’ Sanskrit is thought by many, especially those from Hindu and Buddhist traditions, to be a sacred language. In the Upanishads it is called *ni\_v\_sitam brahma*, the very ‘breath of God.’ Hindus believe that this language is eternal and perfect in its wording and word order. They believe that, at the beginning of every cycle of creation, God remembers the proper order and usage of these Vedic words and reintroduces them.

Sanskrit is the language of Yoga, Ayurvedic medicine, the paths of Buddhism and of ancient mystical texts such as the Vedas and Tantras -. Probably more than any other language, Sanskrit is equipped to deal with metaphysical and spiritual subject matter. It has words for abstract concepts and intangible objects related to the more subtle nature of reality, affording a grasp of a deeper version of ‘truth’ – that is, the inner truth that is sensed intuitively rather than known through outer-world experiential learning or logical reasoning. It can describe the subtleties of human nature and the pursuit of enlightenment.

Ironically, even though Sanskrit is a language well equipped to deal with a wide range of human feelings, poetry and matters of the heart, it is also a very academic and scientific language. Many ancient Sanskrit texts are surprisingly complex, dealing with concepts and theories that have emerged recently in modern science. Ideas such as the big bang theory and atomic theory, for example, have counterparts in Tantric texts that go back thousands of years. They have much to say about many disciplines, including astronomy, astrology, cosmogenesis, cosmic evolution, mathematics, geometry, chemistry and physics.

Sanskrit is considered to be a very precise and unambiguous language. The very word, *Sanskrit* means ‘language brought to formal perfection.’ NASA reporter Rick Briggs says that scientists at NASA, in an effort to develop a precise ‘artificial’ language suitable for the techno-computer age, declared that Sanskrit was the only human language that was completely unambiguous. An

article in Forbes magazine stated that, as we move toward a more sophisticated technology of artificial intelligence, Sanskrit will increasingly become the language of the computer industry (Briggs, 1985; Forbes Magazine, July, 1987).

Sanskrit's association with mantra is well known and well documented. A study of the ancient Vedic and Tantric texts will reveal a wealth of information, including pronunciation and the proper usage of language to maximize the transformative effects of the mantras.

There is much written on the various techniques associated with mantra and the subtleties of certain sounds and their inherent powers. According to these schools of thought, there are masculine, feminine and neutral mantras; the masculine usually end with *hum*, the feminine with *svaha*, and the neutral with *namaha*. Root or seed mantras representing different aspects of divinity are called *bijas*. Here are some examples of *bijas* and their meanings:

*Krim*; (called the Kali Bija) is associated with power over creation and dissolution, recited for conquest of limitations.

*Srim* is associated with the feminine energy of abundance, recited for the acquisition of material joys and prosperity.

*Klim* is associated with procreative desire, recited for joy, bliss and pleasure.

As mentioned, the names of the many Hindu deities are themselves mantras, so that the vibrational quality of the name correlates to the aspects of humanity/divinity embodied by the deity. (Ashley-Farrand, 1999; Padoux, 1990; Paul, 2004).

In the modern era about- half of the world's 6,000 languages are fading away into extinction, due to lack of use and the homogenizing effects of globalisation. Despite this, Sanskrit seems to be making a comeback. In a wider and wider variety of spiritual pursuits, it is being recognized as a sacred language and acknowledged as a powerful healing tool. As yoga and other Eastern traditions become increasingly popular and as chants and mantras are exposed to ever-widening audiences, it seems that Sanskrit is once again being recognized as a magic language. We can use this ancient gift to help raise our vibrations and to enhance our powers of attraction.

### **The significance of the number 108**

Many mystical traditions deem it important for rituals to be performed a specific number of times. The number 108 is very significant to the practice of mantra because, in Vedic and Tantric traditions, a mantra is repeated 108 times. This is thought to be a special number of repetitions, much more powerful than 107 or 109 repetitions, for instance. In other words, mantra is considered to be most effective using sets of 108 repetitions. The Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Islamic and Taoist religions all use a string of prayer beads, usually called a *mala*, that have 108 beads or knots. The Christian rosary also derives from these malas, with 54 beads (not counting the 'tail').

I am often asked why this is – what is the significance of this enigmatic number? That is a question to which there is no quick and easy answer. I will explore several possible ways to shed light on the significance of this special number. Before we focus on the significance of the number 108, it would be useful to consider a concept called 'sacred numbers.' There is a school of thought that claims that some numbers are 'sacred' or significant in that they appear often in nature and in many different contexts throughout history, in many seemingly unrelated cultures. For example, the same numbers might appear in measurement systems (distances, volumes, weights, etc.); in geometrical relationships; angles, measurements, and geographical positions of

ancient structures such as Stonehenge and the Great Pyramid; in ancient texts; in ancient references to magic or alchemy; in certain characteristics of our planet and solar system and other contexts. Sacred numbers hint at a great knowledge held by some ancient societies that had complex calendars and number systems. Some say that the study of sacred numbers can show us the divine order of the universe.

Here are examples of some of the more well-known significant numbers. The numbers, 144,000 and 666, appear in Revelations in the Bible. The former is said to be the number of souls who will be 'saved' on judgment day, while the latter is said to be the number of the 'beast.' Another interpretation is that 144,000 refers to mankind in its enlightened, metaphysical form while 666 refers to mankind in its earthly, physical form. There are other significant aspects to these two numbers as well.

There is a very significant cycle of time associated with a phenomenon that science calls the precession of the equinoxes. This cycle was referred to often by some ancient societies, particularly the Mayans and Sumerians. The number associated with this cycle is 25,920, which is the number of years required for the Earth to complete a grand orbit in the galaxy. In other words, our planet's position relative to other cosmic bodies is exactly the same now as it will be in 25,920 years. This phenomenon is assigned great importance by some schools of thought. Human consciousness is thought to be greatly influenced by our position in the cosmos. This notion forms the basis of the practice of Astrology. When the number 25,920 is divided into the 12 signs of the Zodiac we get 2,160, another very significant number that appears in many contexts. One of the more enigmatic contexts is in relation to the moon, which is 2,160 miles in diameter. If we divide the precessional number by 5 we get the number 5,184, which is the number of years in a period of time that the ancient Mayans called an *ajar*. They believed that human consciousness differs dramatically from *ajar* to *ajar*.

There are many more of these sacred numbers that are significant for a variety of reasons, which are too detailed to discuss here. It is thought that these numbers hold clues to the nature of reality, the human condition and the metaphysical blueprint that underlies our physical universe. Researchers have compiled a fairly long list of them: 3, 12, 36, 60, 72, 108, 144, 216, 252, 288, 396, 432, 576, 648, 846, 1152, 1269, 1548, 1728, 2304, 2592, 3024, 3168, 3456, 3888, 5184, 6912, 10368, 13824, 20736, 27648, 41472, 55296, 82944, 165888, 331776. (Munck, 1997)

Let us now look at some of the 'sacred' numbers that pertain specifically to 108. Two of the roots or factors of 108 are 9 and 12. Curiously, when you add up the digits that constitute almost all of the numbers listed above, they add up to nine. (Try adding them yourself.) The number nine is also significant in that it is the number of digits in our decimal system, not counting zero.

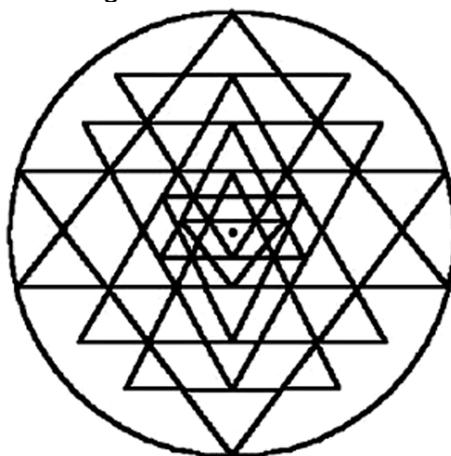
Twelve may be the most significant of all numbers, and is the basis of a phenomenon sometimes called the 'Law of Octaves.' This law and others have been referred to in ancient writings and traditions such as Tantra, alchemy, Hermetic magic, Qabala and shamanic rituals. For some reason, energy often subdivides in divisions of twelve. In fact, twelve is a number that appears over and over in many contexts, in many cultures throughout history. Some of the more common contexts are: twelve months in the year, twelve signs of the Zodiac, twelve hours on a clock-face, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve gods in the Greek pantheon, and twelve apostles surrounding Jesus (who would be the thirteenth). There are far too many examples to list here.

It is noted that if a sphere (picture a ping pong ball) had other equal sized spheres perfectly packed around it, each of them touching all of the spheres next to it, there would be twelve such spheres. The one in the center would be the thirteenth. In music, an octave contains twelve separate notes (both white and black keys on a piano). It is just the natural way that energy divides itself, in a variety of forms. Many bodies of mystical knowledge further claim that there

are twelve realms or levels of reality. The one we call the physical, material realm is said to be the third level, the third 'note' in this grand octave.

The number 108 comes up in a variety of contexts. There are 54 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. Each has a masculine/feminine or *shiva/shakti* aspect:  $54 \times 2$  is 108. On the sacred geometrical configuration known as the *Sri Yantra* (See Figure 1.), there are points called *marmas* where three lines intersect, and there are 54 such intersections. Each intersection also has masculine/feminine or *shiva/shakti* qualities.

Figure 1. The Sri Yantra



In the human body, *marmas* or *marmastanas* are energy intersections similar to charkas. There are said to be 108 *marmas* in the subtle body. Also, it is said that there are a total of 108 main energy lines or *nadis* that radiate from the heart chakra. Thus, the number 108 relates to the Sri Yantra as well as the human body.

The diameter of the sun is 108 times the diameter of the Earth. In astrology, there are 12 houses and 9 planets. In the Krishna tradition, there were said to be 108 *gopis* or maidservants of Krishna. There are 108 forms of traditional Indian dance. In the Vedas there are 108 Upanishads as listed in the *Muktikopanisad*. There is said to be 108 Tantric texts. Ancient texts say that the *Atman*, the human soul, passes through 108 different stages on its path to enlightenment. The list goes on and on.

It may be very difficult to know, in a logical way, why 108 repetitions of a mantra enhances its efficacy. It may in fact be impossible to explain this number's significance in a scientific way. The ancient mystics certainly held it in high esteem. They would say that the number 108 is in sync with the rhythms of time and space. When we use 108 repetitions of a mantra we are saluting the order of the universe and aligning our intentions with the divine will. Said another way, we are harmonizing our personal vibrations with the natural vibrations of creation.

## Chanting

Chants are mantras and devotional affirmations that have been put to music. The repetition, the beauty of the melody, the rhythm – they all help bring the participant into a state of trance and help the mantras to reverberate deep in the recesses of the mind, body and spirit long afterwards. When a group is chanting in unison, with unified intent, the transformative power of

the vibration seems to amplify in an exponential way. Accompanied by strong clear intentions, chanting has great potential to assist in our quest for enlightenment, our ultimate healing. The act of chanting automatically regulates the breath, something that is key to many forms of meditation. Chanting is a powerful form of meditation that can help us invoke a deity, or enter an enhanced state of consciousness. The repetition stills the everyday mind, blissfully freeing the creativity of the unconscious mind and opening the vision of the inner eye. Many forms of sound therapy provide us the opportunity to entrain to the rising vibrations of the planet in these incredible times.

Chanting affects our subtle, spiritual bodies, the functioning of our chakra system and the health of our physical bodies. Studies have shown that chanting mantras can lead to many physical benefits, such as: more coherent and harmonic brain patterns; better communication between left and right hemispheres of the brain; boosted immune systems; increased lymphatic circulation; lowered heart rate and blood pressure; increased production of melatonin, interleukin-1, and other hormones and endorphins; and much more. It has been shown to benefit the treatment of many disorders such as eating disorders, schizophrenia, hyperactivity, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease and others. (Campbell, 1997)

Amongst all the various chants, those that came from the Tantric/Vedic/Sanskrit traditions are probably the most systematized, the most sophisticated, and the most written about. However, there are chants from numerous spiritual traditions and cultures around the globe, including Hebrew, various African tribes, Native American traditions, Australian Aboriginal, Greco/Roman/Christian, Arabic/Islamic/Sufi, and chants from the far East, among others. Some well-known chants are; 'Om Mani Padme Hum' (Sanskrit/Tibetan); 'the Mahamantra - Hare Krishna, Hare Rama' (Sanskrit/Hindu); 'Gloria, In Excelsis Deo' (Latin/Christian); 'Kyrie Eleison' (Greek/Christian), and 'Gatay, Gatay' (Sanskrit/Bhuddist). (There are many excellent teachers and musicians who have done much to bring chanting to the west, including Jonathan Goldman, Robert Gass, Krishna Das, Jai Uttal, Wah, Deva Premal, and many more (Gass, 1999; Goldman, 2002);

## In conclusion

Modern research into the healing potential of sound has uncovered a variety of methodologies, using devices old and new that include singing brass and crystal bowls, whistling Peruvian vessels, tuning forks and even complex computer programs. Fortunately, one of the very best devices for sound healing is easily available to all of us – the human voice. It has been used in many cultures throughout history, often in the form of chants and mantras. The act of chanting often leaves us feeling elated, connected and free. It sends us flying. Chanting and the use of the power of mantra is truly a beautiful and joyful way for us to facilitate our healing process.

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