

## How to Keep Your Practice Thriving

Once we have acknowledged our hunger to go deeper, looked at our commitment to our daily practice, and carved out some time for it in our every day life, it is a wonderful gift that we have given to ourselves.

The mantra that you have been given is like a seed - that is why it is called "beeja mantra." A seed grows and flourishes when planted in a cultivated ground and given the right environment to grow. Having a hunger to go deeper in our practice and fine-tuning our bhava or sentiments (inner disposition), towards our Guru, the mantra is cultivating the ground.

There are four steps to our practice of *jap* (repetition of mantra): (1) *Pranayama*, (2) *Pranava*, (3) *Dhyan*, and (4) *Jap*. The first three steps help us to fine-tune or cleanse our inner environment, and the fourth step, *jap*, is being with our friend, the *mantra*.

### *Pranayama*

#### *The first step of our practice:*

❖ Sitting comfortably with our head and spine straight, we join our palms together and bring them to our nostrils.

❖ Blocking the right nostril with the middle fingertip of the right hand, we breathe in thru the left for a count of three.

❖ Hold the breath for a count of nine (three times longer than the inhalation). While holding the breath, keep your eyes calm and chest relaxed. Enjoy this moment of absorbing the prana.

❖ Breathe out thru the right nostril for a count of six (twice as long of inhalation).

If you have difficulty holding your breath for nine counts, you may want to inhale only for two counts, hold for six, and breathe out for four. In the beginning, it is not necessary to fill your lungs with a long inhalation. What is important is the time ratio of 1:3:2 of inhalation, retention and exhalation. Repeat this cycle at least three times (although nine cycles will bring you more benefit), each time taking the breath in thru left nostril and out thru the right.

**Note:** This *pranayama* is very specific to your *mantra*, and it should not be confused with any other kinds of *pranayama*.

**Caution:** Pay attention to anxiousness that arises during *pranayama*. In this situation keep your eyes calm and chest relaxed. While holding the breath in, staying relaxed and enjoying the retention is important. Usually people want to get right to the *jap* (repeating of the *mantra*), but these steps make the journey very sweet.

### *Pranava*

#### *The second step to our practice:*

Right after doing *pranayama*, we take a deep breath or two, and move into *pranava*: resonating our inner universe with the seed sounds of "OM - MA - KRING."

❖ First take a breath. Keeping your spine straight, raise the sound of *OM* from the naval and take it all the way to the crown. Vibrate the crown with the ending humming sound of "mmmm..." We do three *OMs* in a row, and then follow it with the sound of *MA*.

❖ While resonating with *MA*, evoke the sentiments of yearning and sweetness in your heart as if you are calling out to the perfect Universal Mother, the nurturing energy that is

within you and all around you. During this process your heart fills up with sweet loving sentiments for that Universal nurturing energy or presence. We do this three times in a row then follow it with *KRING*.

❖ We do three *KRINGs* in one breath, raising the sound from the naval, touching the heart and ending with vibrating the crown. (The "I" sound in *KRING* is pronounced as a short "I" sound like in the English word "BRING.") This is one cycle of *pranava* and it should be done a minimum of three rounds and as much as your time permits.

**Note:** After *pranava*, take a few moments to become absolutely still. **This is very important.** Try not to move any part of your body in this time for at least a minute or so. Be the stillness...



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### **Dhyana (Attention)**

#### **The third step of our daily practice:**

After pranava (resonation of OM MA KRING) and momentary stillness, gracefully we move into dhyana. There are two points where we bring our attention to:

❖ First, we bring our attention to the heart and visualize the form of our *mantra* (that you are given and explained at the time of your initiation) sitting on the heart lotus granting fearlessness and boon. If you feel more comfortable with no form, just imagine a blue flame and take that to be the form of the deity of your mantra. Mentally offer a flower to this presence and receive blessings.

❖ Saturated with the emotion of this sweetness, we then bring our attention to the center of the forehead. We meditate on the Guru in the center of the forehead sitting on the lotus clad in white. Guru's form is also granting us fearlessness and boon. If there is no form emerging, visualize white light and take that to be the presence of the Guru. Mentally offer a flower to the guru and receive blessings.

**Note:** *Dhyana* is a very important aspect of cultivating the inner environment. We can spend anywhere from two to five minutes with dhyana. Cultivation of sweetness and connectedness enriches our practice many fold. The sweetness of devotion in our heart and the feeling of being protected establish a deeper connection with our mantra.

After *dhyana* (concentration) and being still for a few moments, we enter into the fourth step, *japa* (repetition of our *mantra*).

### **Japa**

#### **The fourth step of the practice:**

Some *mantras* are done with the breath and some are done with mala beads. The prescribed way to hold and use the beads is:

❖ Let the *mala* hang freely between the loop made by joining the tips of your thumb and the ring finger of the right hand.

❖ Pull each bead with the middle finger towards you with each *mantra*. We don't touch the beads with the index finger. The best place for the hand holding the *mala* is to rest it against the chest while doing the *japa*. If it gets tiresome, the hand could also rest in the lap.

❖ The middle finger of the left hand touches the ground for grounding purposes. Once in a while a tremendous amount of energy is generated during the *japa* and this provides grounding for that energy.

❖ While doing the *japa* we keep our focus on the center of the forehead.

❖ **Sutra: while doing the *japa*, in the center of your forehead, hold the form of the *Guru* clad in white,**

**sitting on a white lotus or hold the image of an intense white light (almost blue) the size of a pearl.**

After finishing the *japa* we do three *pranayama* again before getting up from our meditation.

**Helpful Hints:** In order to maintain our stillness between *pranava* and *japa*, it is helpful to take out our *mala* before starting *pranava*. This way we are

positioned to begin *japa* in stillness. During the whole *japa* try to be as still as possible. This helps us to go deeper. When the urge to move comes, see if you can breathe it out. If it begins to hurt then adjust slightly and go back to stillness.

Here ends the technical information about our daily practice.

### **Mantra**

**Mantra mitra (friend), Mantra sutra (link), Mantra astra (a weapon)**

In our practice, working with the *mantra* is the foundation. *Mantra* is a *mitra* which means a "friend," and cultivating this friendship is our life long task. *Mantra* is our unconditional friend that comes to our side when no one else can. It is said, after receiving your *mantra*, you are never alone again. There is a presence all around you provided you are present to acknowledge it. With every *japa*, a special kind of



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energy builds within you connecting you with the inner strength in the form of trust, that is already there.

The other aspect of the *mantra* is it is a *sutra*, which means a thread, link or connection. It connects you with the “power house” - the spiritual power of the all the enlightened beings from the tradition. There is a sense of belonging to the family of enlightened beings as well as a sense of protection, guidance and inspiration from the enlightened souls.

*Mantra* is also like a weapon (*astra*) that is given to you to protect yourself from harmful events and situations. When pressed against the wall and there is no help to be found, it is this friend that comes to our side. At the time of your initiation, you are given the instruction on how to summon the accumulated power of your *mantra* to protect yourself against adversities.

### Beauty and grace of our practice

Initiation with a *mantra* is an act of transference of trust from the Guru to the initiate. *Mantra* is given to us by our Guru as an unconditional friend. *Mantra* has its own presence and personality. One is never alone after receiving a *mantra*.

Our friend the *mantra* comes to our side when and where no one else can. After imparting the *mantra*, the Guru leaves a protective shield around the initiate which becomes more obvious as the connection with the *mantra* deepens.

In our practice, deepening the friendship with our friend the *mantra* is our life long work. As Baba says, “the day you begin to trust your *mantra* and the *mantra* begins to trust you, nothing seems impossible for you.”

How do we cultivate this kind of love and trust? Just as in our worldly life when we try to come closer to someone special, we find time for that person. Being around that person is not a chore or an obligation; we can not wait until we get to spend some more time together. This kind of inner disposition towards our *mantra* and practice is needed to grow in our practice.

In order to have this kind of sweetness and longing,

the quantity of time is less important than the quality of time spent with our *mantra*.

Carving out a little time in your daily life to be with your “friend” the *mantra* is the most important part of your practice. This time could be anywhere from five minutes to half an hour.

*Mantra* is a direct link or connection with the powerhouse in the form of the Guru and Guru’s lineage. There is a sense of belonging to a spiritual home after the initiation. The collective spiritual power or grace of all the enlightened beings from the lineage becomes accessible to the initiate thru the *mantra*. Protection, guidance and inspiration flows towards the practitioner just by remembering and knowing the connection.

Meditating on the Guru or Guru’s Guru fills us with grace.

It is a good idea for the initiate to learn more about the enlightened beings from the lineage. Reading their stories, contemplating their teachings and meditating on their forms, imagining their closeness to oneself brings about benediction in our lives. Such activities also enrich the environment and open ourselves to receive.

**Baba Harihar Ramji**

