



Sanatana Mitra

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Upcoming Events

June 18 - Kriya Initiation
Philadelphia, PA

June 18 - Opening the Third Eye
Philadelphia, PA

June 19 - Chakra Healing 1
Philadelphia, PA

Aug. 13 - Chakra Healing 1
Union City, CA

Aug. 14 - Opening the Third Eye
Union City, CA

A Mahavakya

The ancient seers expressed their profound insights into reality through certain mantric sayings called mahavakyas (literally, great sayings.) These mahavakyas are mantric because their vibrations can cause mental transformation and lead from normal consciousness to the higher consciousness that apprehended that level of reality. The difference between these mantras and most other types of mantras is that the practitioner is meant to reflect on the underlying meaning as well as experiencing the vibratory power of the saying. Most other types of mantras work through the vibratory power and resonance with higher consciousness and may have no meaning or even where meanings are attributed for easier remembrance, the meaning is to be discarded so as not to excite mental activity.

The following is the mahavakya from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

Aham Brahman-Asmi

I am one with Cosmic Consciousness

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Stages of Transformation

In previous articles, we've explored some key concepts from Patanjali in his yogic exposition, such as chitta, vritti, and nirodha. Another fundamental term used by him is that of parinaama or transformation.

Parinaama is a dynamic process and not a specific state of awareness – it is the process of transformation when applied to consciousness that leads to the state of Self-Realization. According to Patanjali, parinaama when applied to the modes of matter, such as the five senses and the five elements will lead to the achievement of siddhis or special powers. In the course of normal activities, parinaama is the change that occurs in all phases of matter, including the accumulation of karmic disposi-

tions called samskaras.

Before we begin discussing the various parinaamas, it is important to point out that these consciousness transformations can only truly occur in the states of samayama and not in normal consciousness. Keep in mind that the three states of dharana (concentration), dhyana (absorption) and samadhi (ecstatic unity) together constitute what is called samayama. The parinaamas are operating on the stored or seed impressions at a deeper level and not on the gross thoughts which have already been dealt with in earlier stages of meditation.

The first transformation is called nirodha parinaama in which the chitta-vrittis become suppressed by expanding

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The Barrier to Effective Mantra Yoga

Mantra Yoga is that discipline by means of which one can attain Self-realization through the repetition of sounds or words that bridge the gap between our normal consciousness and super-conscious states of awareness. It's said to be a powerful and effective means especially during the eras when the average human consciousness is gravitating towards the lower levels of materiality. Mantras are also used as part of other yogic methodologies such as kriya yoga, raja yoga and bhakti yoga as well as in devotional practices such as ritual pujas and all types of tantric techniques.

However, I've often heard from prac-

titioners who have been initiated into one or more mantras that even after many years of repetition (some tell me that they've been repeating their mantras for twenty years), they have not received the spiritual breakthrough promised. At the beginning, there occurs some encouraging signs such as less tension and more mental focus and maybe even visions but after some time, they are discouraged - their teachers tell them to be patient and keep practicing. Most spiritual seekers give up after a few years while others repeat their mantra sporadically as a security blanket or out of habit, hoping something will happen.

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Stages of Transformation

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the space between mental impressions. When one seed impression disappears and before the next seed impression appears, there is a momentarily gap of no-mind just as when motion in one direction has to be reversed, the object in motion needs to come to a temporary rest first. The transformation occurs when the no-mind gap is extended. The seed impressions are caused by the karmic samskaras and vasanas – the habit patterns and programs from past lives. By the application of effort, a new samskara is built up which aids in the

transformation until the gap of nirodha can be extended at will and indefinitely without much resistance.

The second transformation is called samadhi parinaama. The natural tendency during the first parinaama is for the stored impressions to be highly diverse and so we choose a particular object for samayama and it is the form of the object which leads to more focused and specific streams of impressions. In this transformation, the seed impressions are replaced by the essence of the object stripped of its name and form.

The mind is transformed into a consciousness of direct cognition of the object – the mind stuff takes the form of the object repeatedly.

The third transformation is called ekagrata parinaama or single-pointed transformation. This occurs when the subsiding seed impression is the same as the arising seed impression. During this transformation, the gap between the arising and disappearing seed impression is expanded to such a degree that the seed impression itself can disappear as if it has been split apart, leading to the seedless or Asamprajnata Samadhi state or the avastha of nirbija.

The Barrier to Effective Mantra Yoga

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It is of course important to have patience and persevere in any spiritual discipline but the barrier to effective mantra yoga is more fundamental than the modern tendency towards the quick-fix and immediate gratification of desires. We have a desire to become Self-realized and we think that by getting initiated into a mantra will be an easy and quick method because that is what is promised in many cases. The fundamental barrier is the lack of preparation in the modern spiritual seeker.

The mantra works like a seed in the mind and by proper cultivation, it will grow as a spiritual tree that can bridge the gap between lower and higher consciousness as a physical tree has its roots in the earth and its branches in the sky. The spiritual tree has its roots in the higher consciousness and its branches in the lower. The seed cannot grow if the ground is not properly prepared or it might grow a little and wither away after some time, even if it is properly watered. The ground that has to be prepared for the mantra is the mind itself.

There are different consciousness levels for mantras – they come down from and can lead back to different levels of

super-consciousness. The modern tendency is for teachers to give students higher levels of mantras, especially tantric or vedic ones which cannot grow due to the inherent unpreparedness of the student's mind. The normal mind is full of confusion and myriad thought patterns due to our karmic dispositions and is not a suitable ground for higher mantras. It would be like giving a physics book to a child in kindergarten. The students are demanding higher mantras because they have read or heard about them but what is missing is the proper means. Even teachers have forgotten or do not know what the proper sequence of mantra yoga should be taught.

Traditionally, the student is prepared first with mantras that can remove some of the minor disturbances of the mind – these mantras were taught to children and they repeated them every day. Prior to puberty, the student is then given a mantra sadhana or practice which involves a higher level of awareness and concentration. This second level of mantra sadhana would be practiced for a few years or longer depending on the aspirations of youth - whether towards more spiritual pursuits or towards the house-holder duties. However, should

the student at some time in life have the desire and opportunity to receive initiation into the higher mantras, his or her mind would be well-prepared and there would be rapid progress and results.

The issue is that in our times, the preparation phases have been neglected by the rapid modernization of India and the increasing demand for spiritual fixes in the West, leading to the degeneration of the effectiveness of mantra yoga. There are many unqualified teachers who are forced to give initiations to satisfy their students and even Masters have had to lower their standards to cater for the demands of the spiritual seekers. It is more difficult to find a good student than to find a good teacher these days!

It is necessary to put back the step-by-step structure into mantra yoga and not promulgate misleading and unrealistic expectations from a single mantra initiation for the unprepared. It is important to understand that even if one has the good karma to receive an initiation, if one has not made the effort to prepare one-self, the fruits of the initiation may not appear in this life. However, be of good cheer, because any sincere practice will have a positive effect sooner or later and no effort is wasted.

A Progressive Mantra Yoga Program

The obstacles to an effective or successful mantra yoga practice that can lead to Self-realization in one life-time are:

1. Unpreparedness of the student whose mind is not trained – refer to previous article in this issue.
2. A qualified teacher who can give the mantra (s)
3. Getting a right mantra at the right time – this is particularly neglected because there is an assumption that a mantra that works well with one person will work well with others. Unfortunately, this is very much untrue. It is possible to have negative effects from an otherwise perfectly fantastic and powerful mantra because each person has different karmic blocks and tendencies which can lead to mantra allergy. In the best case, the mantra will simply not work but in the worst case, mental instability can occur. Also, a mantra that might be suitable at a certain time of one's life might not be suitable with the passage of time and the arising of hidden karmic patterns. Great caution is advised – ignorant seekers go where even angels fear to tread – picking up

mantras like grocery from the supermarket is unwise.

To address the first obstacle and partially, the third as well, I recommend a progressive mantra yoga program for those who wish to pursue the mantric path:

1. Level 1 – Harmony: In this spiritual practice, the mantras given are meant to transform the mixed-up and conflicted mind into a more harmonious and peaceful state. A set of mantras are given which are properly termed stotras which invoke the planetary, solar, and divine powers in reverence and proper sequence for different times of the day. This practice overcomes mental and emotional problems as well as removes obstacles in one's life path. These stotras have been declared safe and effective for all persons by generations of sages.

2. Level 2 – Unity: This is an advanced sadhana requiring a harmonious mind and strong concentration. It consists of a sandhya - that is a spiritual practice performed at certain transitional times of the day such as dawn or sunset. This sandhya is a universal

one suitable for all men or women, regardless of religious affiliations as it invokes the power of Cosmic Consciousness, to transform the mind into unity consciousness or samadhi state.

3. Level 3 – Divinity: In this practice, the sincere seeker who has been able to transform his or her mind and achieve some level of samadhi consciousness is now initiated into his or her individual ishta mantra – the unique mantra that will lead to Self-realization. The teacher will need to perceive the correct mantra to give to the student.

Such a progressive program as outlined is consistent with the traditional and effective mantra yoga, reflecting the training that was in place in the past.

A Mahavakya

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This should be repeated aloud and silently as the mood strikes you. It should be repeated day and night. Reflect on the meaning continuously.

This one saying leads to apprehension of the great life questions – such as ‘Who am I?’ ‘What is death?’ ‘Is there God?’ ‘What is my relationship with God?’ and many others that arise in the course of contemplation. The mind must be brought back to the mahavakya for it holds the key to the answers, which will appear like bolts of lightning in the receptive mind.

It is important to have some perspective when practicing this technique because one can enter into delusional mental states such that one will think that ‘I am God.’ Keep in mind that although a glass of water taken from the ocean has the properties of the ocean water, it is only a minute portion of the whole and is separated from the ocean by the glass holding it – the glass of water is not the ocean. Only when the glass of water is returned to the ocean does it become merged with the whole.

More on Spiritual Practice

Previously, I'd introduced the first two of the five verses given by the great Shankaracharya for the spiritual practice according to the vedantic tradition. Let's examine the third verse:

Now, reflect on the essence of the mahavakyas from the Upanishads only

Stop all unnecessary discussions or speculations and focus only on revealed wisdom

Remain absorbed in the attitude of “I am Brahman”

Renounce feelings of pride and arrogance

Give up the identification with the body

Give up argumentation with the sages

The second verse ended with the spiritual aspirant established as the student of a sage and learning at the feet of his Master. When he has learned all that can be learned from the teachings of his preceptor, then it is time for the student to reflect on what has been transmitted. This would typically be the great sayings of the philosophical treatises called the Upanishads which have been sanctioned by generations of sages and shown to lead to the experience of the divine union with one's true Self. The great sayings are called mahavakyas – an example is “Aham Brahmasmi” or “God and I, me and God, are one.”

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More on Spiritual Practice

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There is a tendency for the student to get side-tracked into other philosophical debates or speculations which are not central to his realization and this must be avoided in order not to waste time and resources. One should remain steadfast in one's contemplation.

All the mahavakyas and indeed all the Upanishads are meant to lead to the realization that the soul is spirit and spirit and God are one. In order to achieve this realization, it is necessary to make an adjustment in our attitudes towards one another and towards the world – we cannot act in a manner inconsistent with this teaching and so we cannot act selfishly or in an ordinary manner but would have to “love one's neighbor as one-Self.”

When one has an attitude of being

united with the divine, there is a tendency to be touched by pride and arrogance, however subtly and this has to be avoided and consciously renounced.

The cause of suffering is our disunity from our true nature and subsequent identification with the body. This physical nature is all that we can know with our five senses and so we have grown to think that it is all there is to reality and therefore we must be our physical body. Together with the right attitude of identifying with the divine is the giving up of the wrong attitude of thinking we are the body.

Once we are established in the right attitude and renounced erroneous ones, we begin to achieve the actual experience of the unity that we have previously only intellectually understood.

As we start to glimpse reality, there is a tendency to start sharing with others the truths that we are now convinced that we know. This can lead to confusion and subtle errors because only when we are fully established in wisdom do we realize that reality cannot be discussed or argued upon as it is beyond our normal consciousness and language. Reality is neither dual or non-dual or combination of both. In higher consciousness, we can experience reality as it is but when we come down to the relative world, where something either exists or not exists, all concepts fail to adequately describe it and so there can be no end to dispute. The normal mind is not equipped to deal with reality, only with a four dimensional space-time splice of reality. Shankaracharya therefore counsels that against arguing with sages.