

Sanskrit Mantra Practice - Q&A

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Preface:

Two **definitions of MANTRA**, by Namadeva Acharya (Thomas Ashley-Farrand)

- The word ‘mantra’ is derived from two root terms: Manas, the mind. Trai, to set free from. Therefore the literal meaning of mantra is: ***To set free from the mind.***
 - “A Mantra is a spiritual formula producing a specific result, previously tested and verified by an ancient sage”.
1. **How do Sanskrit mantras work?** Sanskrit is different from most languages because Sanskrit is first and foremost an energy based language, meaning is secondary. There is a precise correlation between the fifty sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet and the fifty petals of the first six major chakras, from the Muladhara to the Ajna center. When we chant Sanskrit mantras or hymns we increase the energetic vibration of the chakras and the internal energy channels (nadis) resulting in an increase in energy circulating through our spiritual physiology. The resulting increase of internal energy flows brings benefits to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and vitality. For more info, on my website see the article “[Sanskrit and the Chakras](https://www.mantravijaya.com/uploads/1/0/9/0/10908678/sanskrit_and_the_chakras.pdf)” .
https://www.mantravijaya.com/uploads/1/0/9/0/10908678/sanskrit_and_the_chakras.pdf
 2. **What is mantra chanting?** Mantra chanting is the vocal or silent repetition of mantras, done either privately or in a group. There are additional forms of mantra repetition and the benefits can vary per each form. For more info, on my website see the article “[Forms of Mantra Practice](https://www.mantravijaya.com/uploads/1/0/9/0/10908678/forms_of_mantra_practice.pdf)” .
https://www.mantravijaya.com/uploads/1/0/9/0/10908678/forms_of_mantra_practice.pdf
 3. **Does mantra chanting require a good voice or musical instruments?** No. Kirtan is one popular form of group mantra chanting that frequently involves musical instruments. There is often great value in participating in Kirtan mantra chanting. Occasionally some Kirtan events emphasize the performance of musicians more than the value of the vocal benefits of the participants.
 4. **Can you get the same benefits from chanting an English word or phrase?** No. When we chant phrases in English we are not gaining the deeper levels of benefits described in question #1 above.
 5. **Is chanting Sanskrit mantra the same as Contemplation forms of Meditation?** No. There are many respected traditions that teach methods of meditation that focus on thinking about the meaning of the mantra. There can be great value in these contemplative forms of meditation. However, the power of Sanskrit Mantra practice is built upon the vibratory relation between the 50 sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet and our spiritual physiology, as explained in the answer to

question #1 above. Contemplation on the meaning of a phrase or mantra, keeps our awareness at the level of our mental thought processes. Sanskrit mantra repetition can enable our awareness to transcend the limitations of our mind.

6. **Can we make up our own Sanskrit mantras?** We should never do this. To quote my teacher Namadeva Acharya (Thomas Ashley-Farrand) *“Working with Sanskrit mantra is like working with fire! A fire can cook your lunch, or it can burn down the forest”*. Authentic Sanskrit mantras are powerful energy tools that can have many benefits due to the ways in which they work with our spiritual physiology. Authentic Sanskrit mantras were first known to advanced yogic rishis (seers) who are said to have directly perceived the mantra sound’s impact on humans. Independently mixing one’s own sequence of mantra sounds can create unintended consequences in our chakras and energy channels that could either be of little value, or could be harmful.

7. **How do I know if a Sanskrit mantra is Authentic?** The first question to ask is what is the source of information on the mantra? If the answer to that question is vague or uncertain, or if the mantra comes from a website that seems to lack credentials, then caution is recommended. See the next two questions for more on this.

8. **How can I use discernment in selecting mantras? And is this important?** If we decide to invest our time in a Sanskrit mantra practice, this is a decision to ingest energy into ourselves. Since mantras can be powerful energy tools that impact us on many levels, we should be selective. Ways to seek evidence of legitimacy of sources include:
 - a. Is the website or book presenting teachings from a well known respected yogic or spiritual tradition or a credentialed scholar?
 - b. Is there a clear explanation of credentials of the teacher or organization presented on the website or in the book?
 - c. Is there a trusted teacher that you know who could advise you on their sense of the validity of the website or book’s content?
 - d. If you have met some of the students or followers of the teacher you are evaluating, do those individuals seem to embody characteristics that you value? Does their organization appear to promote qualities that you aspire to?

Potential cautions include:

- e. The website or book has no association with a known tradition or respected teacher.
 - f. The teacher’s bio seems vague.
 - g. The website appears to offer some value, but their product sales includes many very high priced items that claim to have been *‘empowered’* or *‘blessed’*.
9. **Is listening to Mantra Music beneficial?** Yes, however, there is much greater benefit in chanting the mantras.

 10. **Can I learn mantras from a famous musician, or a popular Kirtan leader?** Yes, but with some important cautions. One of the gifts of many musicians is their artistic creativity. However, if in their creative license the singer or musician has modified the mantra, then it is no longer the effective mantra taught by an authentic tradition. If the famous singer is singing the

mantra with a clause within the mantra repeated extra times, it may have created a beautiful rhythm, but it is no longer the same mantra taught by authentic traditions.

11. **What is a Daily Mantra Practice?** Similar to any daily yogic sadhana (practice) we select the mantra(s) that we want to do as a focused daily discipline, and we decide on the appropriate quantity of daily repetitions of that mantra. Plus we decide how long we are making a commitment (to ourselves) to do this practice.

For beginners of Sanskrit mantra it is recommended to start with just one mantra, chant the daily amount you have chosen for several days. Then after those several days, set your goal to chant that amount of the mantra for a 40 day practice. The daily quantity may be in terms of a counting tool such as mala beads, or you could decide that your daily practice will be to chant the mantra for a set time (e.g. 15 minutes per day). An essential part of doing a daily mantra practice is to create your intention for the mantra practice – as explained for the next question.

12. **What does it mean to *Set My Intention* for the daily mantra practice?** Sanskrit mantras are powerful tools providing many benefits, when practiced on a daily basis. When we *set our intention* for the practice we are affirming, in our own words, the positive outcome that we seek through this practice. The Sanskrit word **Sankalpa** means our deeply felt intention, for any activity that we perform with focused reverence toward some important goal.

As with any daily yogic practice, we should set our intention for the practice. This can be accomplished by privately stating, or thinking, an affirmative statement of why we have decided to do this daily practice. Some people will write their intention statement on a paper and place it in a private place such as an altar or journal, or special book. It is essential to set the intention at the start of the practice, and it is valuable (but optional) to recall that intention before we start each day's practice.

13. **Is Proper Pronunciation of the Sanskrit important?** There is widespread agreement that it is very important to chant the Sanskrit mantras or hymns properly. Unfortunately, that is where the agreement ends, since there are many variations in regional dialects and in historical variations in what is correct Sanskrit pronunciation. There are variations among different lineages. There are disagreements on pronunciation among linguistic scholars. For more info on this large and important topic, see the article on my website titled "[Learning Sanskrit Pronunciation, Getting Past the Dogma and Chauvinism](https://www.mantravijaya.com/uploads/1/0/9/0/10908678/learning_sanskrit_pronunciation.pdf)"