

CHANT & BE HAPPY by Lila Conway



For many of us, our first taste of chanting may have been at a yoga class when 'OM' or the invocation prayer at the beginning was recited. Often something we may have initially resisted or felt uncomfortable with eventually becomes our deepest source of fulfilment and joy!

When Sanskrit words are chanted, a powerful vibration is felt in the body, and simply through mantra repetition you can still the mind, and open the spiritual heart. The pure vibration of the sounds clears away dark and heavy thoughts, uplifts the spirit and simply makes you feel great! The root 'man' in the word mantra comes from the word meaning 'mind', and 'tra' means 'to protect or free'. Ultimately, it means to free your mind from its daily endless chatter!

A mantra is a mystical energy, a divine power manifested through sound and derived from the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Sanskrit is often called 'the language of the Gods' and Sanskrit mantras were perceived by ancient sages who were attuned to higher levels of consciousness. Every mantra contains power and certain vibrations which resonate directly with the subtle energy centres in the body, releasing blockages and awakening the spiritual energy. If you try to translate a Sanskrit mantra into English, the power of the sacred sound energy and form is lost.

There are various ways to chant. You can repeat a mantra verbally or mentally. Constant repetition of a mantra is called Japa meditation and usually a rosary (mala) of 108 beads is used to count how many times the mantra has been chanted. Chanting transcends the mundane preoccupations of the

ordinary mind, and once the mind is purified, higher spiritual truths are revealed.

Devotional group chanting is otherwise known as kirtan. This 'call and response' type of chanting is a form of yoga in itself. Traditionally, kirtan is sung in a group with the 'kirtan walla', or chant leader, singing Sanskrit mantras or holy names of the Divine, in which the audience repeats back in kind. The singing is often accompanied by a harmonium, drums and additional rhythm instruments such as finger cymbals, tambourine and lots of clapping hands!



The only requirements for chanting are to sing from your heart, it is not about having a beautiful voice but rather to chant with feeling and love. When you truly feel that you are chanting to God without inhibition or expectation, then the divine energy flows freely and naturally and the sweetness of devotion pours from your heart in celebration, service, compassion and love.

Make kirtan your prayer, give yourself permission to sing freely, dance freely and let go of the emotions tightly locked in your heart. Enjoy the bliss of communion with the divine and the ecstatic yoga of kirtan that frees the mind and makes your heart sing. CHANT AND BE HAPPY!

OM Chanting Meditation...

The sound vibration OM (pronounced "AUM") is considered to be the most important mantra as its root is contained within all other mantras. OM represents divine creation and supreme consciousness. It is known in almost all spiritual cultures of Eastern philosophy from the Buddhists of Tibet to the Vedantists of India; it is also similar to the word 'Amen'. According to Hindu philosophy, in the beginning of creation there was a word, and this word was OM.

Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position. Keep your spine straight and avoid dropping or tilting your head.

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Relax and let go of any tension with each exhalation.

The Practice

- ☞ Take a deep inhalation and begin chanting OM out loud. The sound should begin in the base of your abdomen, move up through the chest into the throat and finally finish on the lips.
- ☞ Begin with your mouth open as you chant 'AAH' – feel the vibration coming from the abdomen.
- ☞ As the sound moves up, the mouth rounds to the sound 'OU' – feel it vibrating in the chest and then the throat.

☞ Finally, the mouth closes with the sound 'MMM' – feel the sound vibrating on the lips and into the head, especially in the space between the eyebrows.

☞ Start chanting loudly, at least 10 times in succession, making each breath as long as possible.

☞ Gradually become softer until you are almost whispering.

Finally, repeat mentally, inhaling OM, exhaling OM. Practice for at least 10 minutes and gradually increase to 30 minutes.

Benefits

Calms the mind, improves concentration, increases energy levels and feelings of inner peace and tranquillity. Chanting also purifies and charges the energy/atmosphere of the room.

For more details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, visit her website: www.yogaprema.org

