Mantra and Meditation

by Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley)

Yoga and Meditation

Meditation is the ultimate goal of Yoga, the essence of all Vedic ways of knowledge, and the sovereign means to unfold our highest potential in life. Meditation is the most powerful practice for healing the mind and heart as well as for accessing the unlimited awareness behind the universe that constitutes our true immortal Self.

Yet bringing the mind into a state of meditation is not at all easy, much less holding it there. Being able to abide in a state of meditation is one of the most daunting tasks possible for us as human beings. It is sometimes said to be more difficult to conquer the mind than to conquer the entire world. The reason for this difficulty is that our thoughts and memories, extending to deep-seated karmic patterns or samskaras, keep our minds perpetually caught up in conditioned responses and dualistic states contrary to the flow of meditation.

These conditioned patterns go back not only to childhood but also to previous lifetimes. They are connected to powerful collective tendencies and even to genetics. Such conditioned reactions occur automatically at a subconscious level, without our awareness, and have a tremendous inertia behind them. Our ordinary ego is a product of these hidden compulsions of the past and does have the ability to move beyond them. To truly enter into the state of meditation requires letting go of the self and moving beyond the mind.

These conditioned patterns of the mind are reinforced by our environments and life-styles, extending to our associations and habitual activities on all levels. Our culture as a whole in this commercial era is ever working hard to keep us distracted, drawing us to look to the outside for pleasure and happiness, and to remain away from our inner meditative core that is seldom recognized as having any value or reality of its own.

Our educational system rarely teaches meditation or any cultivation of higher awareness and direct perception. It is more concerned with imparting information that may be helpful for understanding the outer world, but remains oblivious to the depths of the inner world of consciousness.

Classical Yoga through the Yoga Sutras is first of all a way of meditation. Yoga is designed to bring peace and calm to the core of the mind in order to help us move beyond all karmic conditionings. All the practices of Yoga lead us in the direction
of thought free awareness, creating a meditative life-style and a meditative way of using body, prana, senses and mind. The *Yoga Sutras* defines Yoga as samadhi or the state of deep meditation, reflecting this orientation.

Meditation specifically relates to the last three of the eight limbs of Yoga as *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (unitary awareness or deep meditation). These three are combined as the practice of *samyama* or deep yogic meditative concentration that is the main tool of Yoga practice.

**The One-Pointed Mind and Unitary Mind**

Yoga teaches us that for the mind to reach a silent meditative state, it must first be concentrated and made one-pointed, as sharp as the proverbial razor’s edge. The *niruddha chitta*, or “absorbed state of mind,” can arise only from the *ekagra chitta* or “one-pointed mind.” A distracted mind cannot enter into meditation directly. It must be concentrated first. This is like having to know how to walk before one can attempt to run.

Today our minds are not at all one-pointed, as we all well know. Our minds are habituated to constant stimulation through the mass media, computer and high tech realms, which are ever growing more powerful and subtler in their influences. The result of this increasing stimulation of our minds, senses and nervous systems is that our attention span is decreasing. Our minds are scattered and quickly follow one outer impulse after the other, reflecting what is dominant externally at any given moment.

The key to the one-pointed mind is to develop a sustained power of attention, so that we can hold our focus on any object without distraction for a period of an hour minimum. Most of us cannot hold our awareness in a concentrated manner for more than a few minutes or even seconds. We either get distracted or become dull or mentally tired.

Dharana or yogic concentration rests upon developing the power of attention. It must be cultivated over a long period of time for its strength and power to grow.

Many people try to meditate directly or sit in a state of stillness observing their thoughts. This seldom works because the distracted mind will continually intrude with its disturbed energies. Such meditation without concentration only allows our subconscious minds to eventually take over our meditation. It is like going out on the sea in a leaky boat. It will not go very far.

Yet concentration of mind is aided by calm in the body, both through Yoga asana and Ayurvedic doshic balancing. It rests upon concentration of the senses. Holding
the awareness at the third eye or otherwise directing a focused gaze helps us on this manner. Concentration of the mind is aided by concentration of the breath, as in drawing the prana within, whether to the third eye or to the spiritual heart. This is the importance of the other limbs of Yoga in mantra and meditation.

I like to call the one-pointed mind as the “unitary mind,” as it implies some degree of unification of our mental field according to a sense of the oneness of all life. Our ordinary mind is caught in ever shifting patterns of duality and multiplicity. We seldom do anything with a complete focus, clear intent, or a unitary stream of attention. We are often creatures of the moment and passing outer influences. We imitate others rather than reflect our own inner being and authentic Self.

The unitary mind in turn rests upon the “unitary prana.” Ordinarily our vital force and breath, like our thoughts, is caught in dualistic emotions and shifting sensations, so that our energy also lacks focus and concentration. We cannot forget the role of prana in concentration. This is not just a matter of deep breathing but having focus in our life’s purpose.

**The Importance of Mantra**

How then can we create the unitary mind and unitary prana necessary to allow us to enter into the unitary state of meditation?

Our thoughts consist of vibrations of sound, prana, intention and meaning, all mixed together. We need to gather and focus these in a single direction. The simplest way to do this is to concentrate the mind on a particularly meaningful and energized sound pattern, which can then come to dominate the mental field as a whole. This is the mantra.

The main yogic tool to prepare the mind for meditation is the use of a mantra. Through focusing on a mantra, we can gain a greater power of attention and focus of mind. We can reclaim our attention from the external world and draw it back within our own minds and hearts. The mantra serves to gather in our awareness, empower our attention, and energize the mind. It takes the natural sound energy of the mind and allows us to use it in a conscious and determined manner.

Of the many types of mantras available, the simplest and best for making the mind one-pointed are the single syllable bija mantras starting with Om. These include various single syllable Shakti mantras like Hrim or Shrim. They include the single syllable primordial sound mantras that reflect the powers of the Sanskrit alphabet, itself a garland of mantras and a blueprint of cosmic sounds.
Divine name mantras like *Om namah Shivaya!* are also important here, particularly when energized with devotion. Vedic mantras like the Gayatri mantra as longer contemplative prayers can be used to awaken the mantric state of mind and stimulate our aspiration to the Divine light.

Through the use of a singular mantra, we can move the mind into a state of concentration, which will ultimately become a singularity in consciousness, into which all of our negative karmas and samskaras can be dissolved. This singularity of the mind takes us beyond local reality, time and space, and links us up to universal consciousness, uncovering our true Self that is one with all, present everywhere and ever full and overflowing.

**Working with the Mantra**

For the mantra to have power, we must learn to energize our mantra with prana, intention and meaning. We must learn to place our entire life-energy and life-focus into it, as if it were our child. We need to energize it with an intention to find the higher truth or sacred presence. We must endow it with the meaning of unity, the Self that is one with all.

We also need to energize the mantra with patience, beauty and grace. The mantra is not just a technique or an outer tool, but like the paintbrush of a true artist, we must color it with our deeper aspirations in life. Otherwise the mantra itself can become a mechanical sound that we repeat automatically and creates an entropy of its own that keeps us unaware. Giving life to the mantra is key to its efficacy, which is to make the mantra our life.

It is important for everyone to have a mantra and to work with seed mantras on a regular basis. This is the foundation for meditation and control of the mind. Mantra gives us a grip on the mind as it were, which is otherwise like trying to grasp space. The mind has a natural singular focus as our point of attention. The mantra cultivates this focus and continually strengthens it.

The mantric mind will, in turn, provide focus and clarity for all of our thoughts and intentions. It will allow us the concentrated perception so that we can look beneath the surface and discover the essence of all life. The mantric mind is the truth-bearing mind that reflects the cosmic principles or dharma through which the universal reality is directly known. Mantra is the language of the “Cosmic Mind” or *Mahat Tattva*.

The mantric mind leads us into a state of “mantric thinking,” which has clarity, focus, intent and determination. Mantric thinking allows us to set our lives in order and to understand the natural laws at work both within and around us. When our
thoughts become mantric, then what we think can become a reality and has a power to benefit and enlighten everyone. Mantric thinking has the power to manifest whatever we give our attention to. It can work magic, but to reach that magic requires a long and intense practice.

**Mantra and the Natural State of Meditation**

The state of meditation is the natural state of the mind and heart, when our energies are turned and held within. The problem is that the ordinary state of our minds is usually turned without, meaning that we must learn to turn the current of awareness within and go against the outgoing impulses of the senses. The mantra enables us to do this. The vocal organ is the dominant of all the motor organs. By turning it within, all the other sense and motor faculties will also move within.

Meditation is a deep state of stillness, silence and space. It is a profound state of forgetfulness in which we can contact the great Unknown that is the presence of a boundless reality of consciousness.

In that state of deep meditation, we can have the most profound emotional healing, but may not even notice it. We can also access deeper prana for the body and senses. Yet, ultimately, we will forget about ourselves and the outer world altogether, which will merge into a meditative reality that embraces the entire universe.

Mantra ultimately puts us in touch with the Divine Word or Voice of the silence that is the ultimate sound vibration behind all the forces and energies in the universe, which creates, preserves and dissolves everything. Mantra is the vibration of the meditative mind, which is the individual mind in contact with the cosmic mind. The ocean of mantric vibrations takes us beyond our limited individual sense of self into a sense of Self that is unbounded.

Mantra creates the focus, which when sustained allows the mind to become like a mirror, which is the state of deep meditation. The mantra itself may eventually fall off, be forgotten or merge into silence. The fully concentrated or mantric mind ceases to move and becomes full of peace and power.

Mantra is root of meditation and the expression of meditation is mantra. Meditation is the key to all direct perception, direct experience and higher knowledge, which flows through the mantra as a ray of light.

The culture of meditation is the highest human culture that lifts us beyond the merely human to the universal. This is also the culture of mantra. Mantra and
meditation takes us to the state of samadhi in which we can become one with all, which is the supreme goal of Yoga.

Whatever you may do in the field of Yoga and the Vedic sciences, the ultimate knowledge is the mantra and the ultimate practice is meditation.

About the Author

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Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley) is a Vedic teacher or acharya working internationally to promote Vedic knowledge. He is noted for his ability to integrate Ayurveda, Yoga and Vedic astrology into a single system for raising consciousness that can be easily understood and applied today. His work has been honored in India and in the West.

Vamadeva is the author of over thirty books published in twenty languages over the last thirty years. He has authored many articles and several sets of Vedic course materials. A student of the Sanskrit language, he has translated ancient Vedic texts, including the Rigveda and Upanishads. His recent book Mantra Yoga and Primal Sound is regarded as one of the best available texts on mantra, and includes the practice of mantra meditation. He also teaches Vedantic meditation based upon the teachings of Ramana Maharshi.

Vamadeva is an advisor for several Ayurvedic and Yoga groups and institutions. He has worked with many spiritual and healing organizations worldwide. He has taught at the Chopra center since its inception nearly twenty years ago. The nature of his work and teachings, and other Vedic connections, is explained on his website.