

Vedic Mantras: An Influential Factor for Spiritual Health

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Abstract

Mantra Yoga is a scientific method devised by the *Rishis* to activate the extrasensory energy centers within to facilitate the sublime flow of vital spiritual currents in this majestic living system. The amazing structure, functions and complexity of the human body has been the center of deep attention for thousands of scientists, biologists, anatomists and physiologists since long. Still a lot remains unknown, especially the body's fine network of nerves, molecular functions, endocrine system and the brain. In comparison, what has been experienced and known about the human body and brain by rigorous *yoga-sadhanas* seems to be more thorough and significant. In the deep state of trance through devout *yoga sadhanas*, the *Rishis*, the yogis of the Vedic times, had found this body a miniature reflection of the entire cosmos, as mentioned in the quote – "*Yat Brahmande Tat Pinde*". Mantras have great significance in the mental and spiritual evolution of harmony. These could also manifest tremendous results in the physical world; they could be powerful like a Patton tank or an atomic bomb. Our spiritually empowered, eminent ancestors – the *Rishis*, knew this fact and had therefore developed a whole gamut of mantras for specific purposes and had also devised the methods of experimentation with use of these subliminal tools.

Key words: Mantra yoga, Spiritual health, *Yoga sadhana*, the *Rishis*

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Introduction:

Practice of Yoga modulates health by influencing almost all systems in our body and improves the quality of life of the practitioners (1). It might be more congruent with values, belief and philosophical orientation towards health and life evincing much interest in recent times. The subjective benefits of yoga such as self, self realization, self-awareness are still unaccountable with the available physiological techniques. Even the exact mechanism by which Yoga modulates health or disease is not vivid.

The entire Vedic Literature and the sages and savants of the *shastric* scriptures have given paramount importance to the Mantra Yoga and have discussed in detail the methods of the *japa* and *sadhana* of this System. There is no scripture, which does not sing paeans of the preeminent benefits and supramental effects of the mantra that encompass the personal, global and the cosmic realms of existence. It is said that even if one performs the *japa* and *dhyana* (meditation) of this mantra with fervent faith without going through all the prescribed ascetic disciplines of higher-level *sadhanas*, he attains all the blessings and boons of this mantra. Not only the immanent inspirations and the marvelous configuration of specific syllables and sonic patterns, the psychological and spiritual core of this Vedic Mantra is also so sound that it appears to be founded on profound scientific basis. Let us look at some of these aspects to understand the impact of its *japa*.

The *japa* of Divine Name or Mantras has been an integral part of all modes of worship or prayer in every religion – be it Hindu, Sikh, Islam, Buddhist, Christian, Tao, Bahai, etc. As the specific pattern of controlled wind-flow through the holes of a flute produces specific sonorous tune, likewise, the vibrations induced by the repeated rhythmic chanting of a specific mantra generate specific pulsation of *prāṇa* and stimulate the extrasensory energy nuclei in the body accordingly. The *japa-sadhana* of mantras

is therefore practiced to educe supernatural talents and potentials.

Since the 1970's researchers have been testing how yoga and other stress-reduction and meditation techniques can reduce the presence of anxiety. With research still on the rise today, yoga has been greatly commended for its triumphs in "modulating stresses response systems" (2). The physiological symptoms associated with anxiety mentioned previously have all been found to become significantly reduced in many cases of research, including heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration.

A particular form of yoga, which invites controlled breathing, was studied for its positive effect on eliminating anxiety. The breath-work yoga technique is called *Sudarshan Kriya* yoga (SKY). SKY "involves several types of cyclical breathing patterns, ranging from slow and calming to rapid and stimulating" (3). In one study, participants conducted 30 minutes of SKY breathing six days a week. This study compared the use of this breathing technique with bilateral electroconvulsive therapy and the antidepressant, Imipramine in 45 people who were hospitalized for anxiety/depression.

Through the techniques of *Sudarshan Kriya* Yoga and other *pranic* forms of breathing a sufferer of chronic anxiety has the opportunity to reduce the presence of both their physiological symptoms and the psychological problems beneath them. *Pranayama* and yogic breath work offers a safe, gentle and very effective alternative to medical treatment and the use of prescription drugs to help reduce anxiety. It seems that the commitment to a yogic lifestyle is indicative to living a life in which the whole body's health is attended to. One cannot employ just one strategy and continue on with all of their same destructive habits. It is a commitment to the highest degree. It is important that in conjunction with *pranayama* techniques one must also make an attempt to radically improve their lifestyle. The practice of *pranayama* is only

effective if it is done consistently and with awareness. One must pay attention to what is going on in their body and listen deeply to these inner cues; otherwise the practice will bare little effectiveness for the afflicted person.

Mantra Yoga practice is noted to produce changes in heart rate, blood pressure, galvanic skin response, respiratory rate, fasting blood glucose (Type II diabetes mellitus and healthy), breath holding time, auditory and visual reaction times, and intraocular pressure (4). A simple *pranayama* technique ensures better utilization of oxygen from the air that we breathe, better utilization of lung surface and the better circulation of oxygenated blood (5). Yoga practice has also been shown to influence the cardiovascular system with decrease in heart rate, and blood pressure (6). Practice of yoga inhibits sympathetic tone in the skeletal muscle blood vessels leading to vasodilatation thus decreasing the peripheral vascular resistance and decreasing diastolic blood pressure (BP) (7). Studies have shown that there is an increase in the HF power of autonomic functions indicating increased vagal tone and decrease in the LF power which denotes the sympathetic nervous function (8). It has been well documented that practice of yoga induces a shift in the autonomic balance towards relative parasympathetic dominance (9).

The autonomic nervous system is divided into two separate parts as well which are called the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. These two system's jobs are to balance and regulate the body. If we become frightened and our heart starts pumping incredibly hard the parasympathetic nervous system will intervene and slow down the heart rate. If the heart rate then drops too dramatically the sympathetic nervous system then will begin to speed up the heart rate to keep the body functioning on a sustainable level. Inside the body when our sympathetic nervous system becomes engaged the adrenal glands increase adrenaline and cortisone production. This is what causes the common symptoms people often associate with anxiety. For instance, the heart rate begins to

soar and the breathing becomes shallow, the hands and feet become cold and muscles tighten and contract.

Discussion:

The preeminence of the *japa* of *Gayatri* Mantra lies in its unique intellectual, emotional and spiritual effects in addition to other soul-elevating effects of mantra-*japa*. This mantra contains the essence of divine knowledge and wisdom. Even its literal translation implies a prayer for the refinement and illumination of our mind and intellect and for well-being of the world. This is why the Vedic *Rishis* revered *Gayatri* as – *Vedmata*, *Devamata* and *Vishwamata* (the origin of the Vedas, the Mother of godly-beings and the Mother of the whole world respectively). Not only the Hindu religion, but also the follower of other religions and paths of spiritual seeking revere this sacred mantra. Mahatma Gandhi referred to it as the basis of the world religion of the future.

The structure of *Gayatri* Mantra is in perfect tune with the science of cosmic sound. It will not be possible for us to analyze its sonic pattern and the resonance of its subtle vibrations in this small article. We shall mainly elucidate the major steps of psychological elevation and evolution of a *sadhaka's* consciousness by the *japa* of this mantra.

Japa is a scientific process of inward orientation of mind. The *japa* of the *Gayatri* Mantra enables a harmonious linkage and flow of the individual consciousness (of the *sadhaka*) with the cosmic consciousness. If a beginner understands the psychological impact of mantra-*japa* or has intrinsic faith in it then meditating as per the requirement of the *japa-sadhana* will not be difficult for him. With prior conditioning of the mind, the rhythmic process of *japa* also helps in controlling its waywardness. Once this stage of training of the mind is over, the progress of meditation and hence the *japa-sadhana* moves quite smoothly and at an uninterrupted pace (10).

In terms of mental and emotional enlightenment, *japa (japa- sadhana)* involves the following: (i) Training – repeating the same mantra; (ii) Recognition – imbibing the inspirations of what has been repeated; (iii) Recollection and Contemplation – recalling the mental connection during meditation and reestablishing the broken links with the inner self; (iv) Retention – Deepening the faith (in the mantra) and sincerity to the level of inner experience and intrinsic emotions. In terms of spiritual elevation these correspond to – (i) Self-Analysis; (ii) Self-Refinement; (iii) Self-Development; (iv) Self-Realization. These are gradual steps of the realization through *japa- sadhana*. Although we don't find the multiple activities and exercises like yoga practices in it, the *sadhana* process of *japa* is so effective that just with the sincere performance of this single practice, starting with self-analysis, we can reach the supreme goal of self-realization.

The great significance of *japa* is not due to chance, or without any firm basis. Had it been so, such a large number of devotees and yogis of the *Gayatri Sadhana* would not have been advised to waste time in practicing more and more *japa* for longer and longer durations. The aforesaid principles of psychology and spirituality work towards success of *japa*. These can elevate the devotee's personality out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of divine wisdom. The four principles mentioned above work in the subliminal domains of the consciousness to remove the layers of ignorance from the subconscious and thus help in the emergence of light of spirit within the individual soul.

During this process one experiences ups and downs in the mental and emotional domains. The baser instincts and tendencies accumulated during innumerable births of the fallen soul in different forms before the present life are not easy to be uprooted and thrown out. These *kusamskaras*, coupled with the ignorance-driven ego, struggle hard to obstruct the process of inner purification in the initial phases. However, with the continuity of the *japa- sadhana* the devotee realizes that he is not the body but the

eternal soul and therefore gains the light and courage to fight and eliminate all the hurdles in the path of self-realization. He consciously and gladly undergoes the prescribed austerities to loosen the hold of internal evils and passions. He understands that only the path of selfless service leads to true happiness, and that spiritual life is far more superior to life wasted in the pursuit of materialistic success and power. Nothing can then stop his march towards self-awakening.

Human ego-centered false self and its gross appearance is only a vehicle for the manifestation of his soul. This world of mirage is not his true home. He is guided by divine grace on his journey back to his real home- the realm of eternal light. Just, as the puppet show would be absurdly haphazard if even a few threads that control its movements are broken or loosened, as the young kid is orphaned and becomes helpless due to the sudden demise of his parents, as the house becomes dark in the night if its electrical power supply is cut, similarly the soul, the individual self, suffers an illusory, ignorant, and evanescent existence if its subliminal linkage with divinity is broken. We are way-lost children in the wilderness of this illusory phenomenon; groping for the sunlit path leading us back home.

Finding this sunlit path and reestablishment of this lost connection with the source by awakening of the true inner consciousness is the third factor of *japa-sadhana*. In the powers of *japa*, the inner self awakens and recognizes its soul-identity; the soul too recalls its divine nature. As this retrieval of lost memory progresses, it ponders upon its origin more deeply and gets anxious to unite with the source. This intensifies the reactivation of its sublime connection with the divine self. It calls upon the divine Mother (*Gayatri*) to save and protect it from illusions, diversions and pitfalls of the worldly cycle. This stage purifies the *sadhaka's* gross and subtle bodies; his mind now gets educed and illuminated by positive and righteous aspirations. His personality is gradually suffused with nobility.

The fourth stage signifies a still higher state of spiritual maturity. With deeper and purer engagement in the *japa* of *Gayatri Mantra*, the *sadhaka* sees the light of his soul in the radiance of the subtle body of the sun – the cosmic center of this mantra. As this realization intensifies, he begins to experience, in deep trance, the unity of his soul with the cosmic soul (God). He then sees the identity of his soul as a reflection of the *Brahm* – conveyed in the *Vedant* Philosophy as "*Ayamatma Brahm*", "*Tatvamasi*", "*Soahm*", "*Shivoaham*", etc. This state is referred to in the *Shastras* as *samadhi*, *turiavastha* or *para siddhi* – the state of ultimate beatitude, absolute bliss and supreme accomplishment.

Japa-sadhana alone, if performed with sincerity, purity and intrinsic faith, leads to this state of eternal bliss and light. It is therefore referred to as the key to the deeper science of spirituality and also revered as a *yajna*. *Japa yajna* alone is a complete source of ultimate self-realization.

By the divine energy immanent in the Vedic Mantras, we can attain supramental knowledge and actualize the potentials that are otherwise unbelievable, unimaginable and unreachable. Understanding and attainment of such extrasensory faculties are yet beyond the scope of the modern scientific advancement. *Japa* is therefore not well recognized or practiced by many of the so-called scientifically progressive people. We do see many of the erudite scholars, great scientists and elites engulfed in the sorrows, delusions and sufferings of the world despite their talents and resources; whereas there are some illiterate but spiritually elevated souls endowed with divine bliss and wisdom attained through sincere *japa-sadhana* of the *Gayatri Mantra*.

The energy locked up in the mantras is essentially spiritual in nature. The specific configurations of the Vedic Mantras are said to be derived from the subtle science of syllables and sound. The *rishis*, who had realized the cosmic and spiritual dimensions of the omnipresent eternal sound, had compiled these mantras. The consistency of the rhythm and

amplitude of the mantras are therefore of vital importance. The prescribed modes and number of *japas* every day for specific *sadhana* are also enjoined accordingly. The *sadhaka* should follow these with due sincerity and punctuality. Sometime slow sometime fast speed or pitch of *japa* or performing the *japa* in a half-asleep or inconsistent way does not serve any purpose. Sitting with erect spine and in a state of mental peace, regularity of timings for *japa* are essential prerequisites for steady and sure progress.

The extrasensory components like the *Sat-cakras*, *upatyikas* and the marvelous nerve network hidden in it are found to be like nuclei and canals of cosmic energy. Having the model of the limitless cosmos in its small structure makes the human body the supreme creation in the physical manifestation of Nature.

Conclusion:

Purity of the body and mind is another prerequisite for concentration of mind and proper meditation. It is advised to do the *japa* with the help of a rosary so that counting will also be automatic with the mechanical move of the hand on its beads with each complete chanting of the mantra, without disturbing the mental concentration. The *upanshu* type *japa* is said to be the best for the beginners. Here, one chants the mantra so that his tongue and lips may move but the voice is inaudible. Once one has perfected the rhythmic chanting of the mantra he may check the timings of specified number of *japas* according to his natural frequency and may use a clock (alarm) instead of a rosary, as per his convenience.

Anyone who sincerely and rightly performs the *japa-sadhana* of the *Gayatri Mantra* begins to gradually progress through the aforesaid four stages of psychological and spiritual refinement and attains the ultimate goal. His mind and intellect are transformed and illuminated with divine love, light and wisdom and he awakens to the supreme reality of truth, consciousness, bliss (*sat-chita-anand*) beyond the limits of time and space. Material well-being and elimination of

worldly problems accrue to the *sadhak*, but these are mere byproducts of the spiritual illumination. Nothing remains to be gained or aspired for thereafter. Everyone, without any constraint of caste, creed, gender or social status, is entitled to undertake this scientific experiment of *japa-sadhana* of *Gayatri Mantra* and be the recipient of divine grace.

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