

# On Chanting. A gist of a discourse on chanting by...

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A gist of a discourse on chanting by Yogacharya Krishnamacharya:

Many of you grew up in households where some mantras whether *Suprabhaṭām* or *Bhaja Govindam* played in the background or someone who had deep faith in Hanuman, chanted the *Hanuman Chālisa* silently or chanted it loudly so that the entire home was filled with those vibrations. This is done so that you are exposed to the power of sound. But more than listening passively you must use your voice to heal yourself and progress in life.

## Chanting in *yoga sādhana*.

Why is chanting an important part of *yoga sādhana*? The focus of *yoga abhyāsa* is *tapas*. Why is *tapas* the starting point? Most people have a conditioned mind, so our responses and views of the world are also conditioned which comes from a space of strong compulsive energy (*abhinivesha*). These actions cause disturbances or *duḥkha*. Only when one has a grasp of my inner processes and makes meaningful choices will one be able to go beyond *duḥkha*. *Tapas* is the process through which one ripens or purifies the mind and body, to dissolve these compulsive responses.

## Using *agni* — the fire in the body

Ripening is through the heat that is there in our body. There are three types of fire- *dhyāna agni* the fire of an insightful mind, *jaṭharāgni* — the digestive fire and *deha agni* — the heat in the body. If the fire is subdued or over-emphasized, ripening cannot take place. There are many practices in Yoga to tend this fire in the right way so that the seeds of the *saṃskāra*-s can be burnt.

*Vāk* (speech) is *agni* in the manifest form. It rises with the *prāṇa agni* — the fire inherent in one's life energy, to become one with *dhyāna agni* in one's mind. Chanting is a way to travel back to the source. When you chant and listen intently to the sound of the chanting, you will become aware of how the sound is produced in your body and how the breath is controlled. This balances the *jaṭhara agni* and *dEha agni*. When you can observe how the sound arises in

your mind, you start the journey of awakening *dhyAna agni*.

### **Chanting and *prāṇa nādi***

There are *prāṇa nādi-s* within our body, which are energy channels. Chanting done correctly helps cleanse the channels to streamline the flow of energy because they vibrate the *nādi-s*. At this level, you may not understand the meaning of the chants, but they affect you. Thus, the choice of chant is the basis of your specific need. E.g. years ago, I had a young student who practised chanting the *agni bīja mantra* with *virabhadrāsana*. He liked the feeling and overdid the practice and after a few weeks, he developed red eyes and boils and experienced irritability. All of this happened because the heating process became excessive.

### **Chanting with meaning**

When you add meaning and understand the object referred to in the chant your mind becomes more subtle. E.g. When you chant the *gāyatri mantra*, bring your focus to the rising sun. This will enhance the experience and the effect of the chant. The yogic theory says that the object of your attention affects your psyche. In this case, the morning sun is the purest form of nature and the energy of rays can help dissolve the inner blocks. Care must be taken to choose the *devatā* of the *mantra* that is right for you.

### **Going even deeper**

The third level is when you pay attention to the origin of the sound and energies of the *Prakṛti* that generates the sound. This means that your mind is becoming subtle, and acts from silence. It can therefore observe the origin of the sound from silence. When you stay in this deep state, you start identifying with *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. This has been described in great detail in the *Shiva sutras*. *Mātrā* refers to the vibration of the letter. *Prakṛti* is composed of the energy of *satvam*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These three interact in certain ratios, proportions and rhythms. This interaction is the basis of manifestation. Chanting helps one to harmonise the mind with this fundamental pattern.

Some shlokas describe the beauty and power of the divine. *Vishnu sahasranāmam* focuses on the myriad aspects of the one Vishnu. There are similar *śloka* on Devi and Shiva. There are *bīja mantra-s* that awaken psychic energies. Each has a different effect. *Bīja mantra-s* and *Veda mantra-s* emanate from the *praṇava mantra* or OM. Thus, their sound is the same as their visual or energy form and is integrated and balanced. Regular chanting while listening carefully and observing yourself will help you discover the form that is implicitly held in the sound.