

Le Guru is You! Hatha Yoga and Beyond

by Paul Reynolds

A Few Words on Aums (Oms), Mantra and Mudra

The scene is now almost a stereotype - the yogi seated, legs crossed in padmasana (lotus posture), a beatific glow surrounding him as his hands are resting on his knees palms up, with his index finger and thumb pressed lightly together in jnana mudra ... and from his lips the resounding sound of "Om" trails off into the ethers...

What are these aspects of the yogic practice? From whence have they come and what purpose do they play in our hatha yoga practice??

MANTRA

Mantra is a combination of two Sanskrit words. The first is "manas," or mind, and the second is from the Sanskrit "tra," to protect or to free from. Basically it means to free oneself from the vagaries of the mind.

Many consider the use of mantra a yoga in and of itself. Like hatha yoga, jnana yoga, karma, raja yoga and other expressions, mantra carries the underlying definition of connection (yuj, yoking or to bring together).

The study of that quality that bridges the gap between the manifest and absolute realms was called mantra-vidya. It points to the vibrational quality of reality and is now recognized by modern day physicists.

AUM – THE UNSTRUCK SOUND

The most ancient, original mantra is "Aum" (Om). Sanskrit tradition calls it the Anahata Nada – *the un-struck sound - the sound that is not made by two things striking together.* In the Hindu "dharma" (way of being) it is considered the sound of the infinite.

Aum, then, implies the primal energy of source, perhaps closely akin to the humming of an electrical transformer or perhaps the humming between molecules and atoms that our human audible receptors are incapable of hearing.



Though some spell the sound as "Om" its origin is in the three Sanskrit sounds of "a" (as in father), "u" (as in who), and the resounding "m." In the ancient Upanishads it was written that the sound was associated with the four planes of consciousness: "a" - normal waking consciousness, the sound of creation, associated and with Brahma; "u" - dream consciousness/preservation and the god incarnation Vishnu; and "m" - the realm of deep dreamless sleep, the Hindu Shiva destruction or dissolution. Then there is the fourth "sound," the un-struck sound, the sound of the silence at the end of the Aum syllable. Graphically it is represented by the "bindi," the dot held in the upturned crescent usually placed to the left of the "3" sign. Therein lies the vibrational connection between all that we can perceive audibly, in our dreams, in other realities and beyond.

True definitions of mantras are varied, and sometimes next to impossible to translate, as they are about experiencing a certain state of consciousness brought about by the repetition of the word or phrase. They are very individual to each chanter. According to the *Svacchanda-Tantra*, an ancient text, there are more than twenty million mantras. The following are but a few examples.

Om Namah Shivaya

One of the oldest of mantras, this is a prime example of their "untranslatable" nature. A very rough non-literal translation is "Om and salutations to that which I am capable of becoming."

Om Mani Padme Hum

This mantra is probably practiced more than any other in the world. The approximate translation is "Om, salutations to the Jewel of

Consciousness (the mind) which has reached the heart's lotus." The intention is to raise compassion in the chanter and acknowledge the limitless when mind and heart are united.

Hare Rama Hare Krishna

Many times a deity's name alone is invoked in repetitious mantra. In the West we have come to know the following mantra: Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, which refers to the names of the God Vishnu in various forms, and was made popular by the Society of Krishna Consciousness in the late '60s.

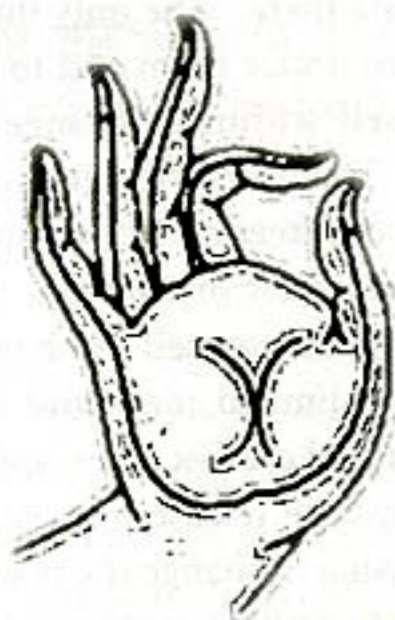
From the vibrational context we move to another aspect of energy and its movement.

MUDRA

Asana forms (postures) are essentially mudras (energy re-circulators or seals) but the mudras we have come to know are hand postures or signals that have been associated with many qualities. In their beginning use it has been said that ancient tantrikas (teachers of the tantric path of liberation) used the hand gestures to communicate with their adepts or their followers. Since then mudras have become a recognized element of ritual worship (puja), dance and yoga.

Healing powers are also attributed to mudras and like the mantra these expressions of and movers of energy have been given many names and attributes depending on the lineage that you are expressing.

EXAMPLES OF MUDRASI:

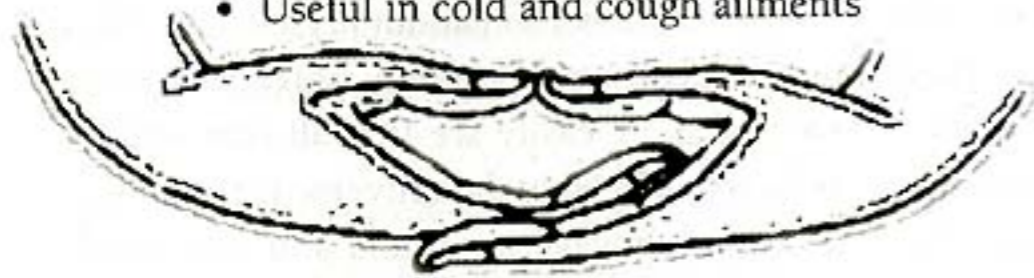


Gyan or Jnana or Chin Mudra – the most widely recognized, with the tip of the forefinger touching the tip of the thumb.

- Bestows intelligence and wisdom
- Purifies the mind of the practitioner
- Cures intoxication and addictive habits

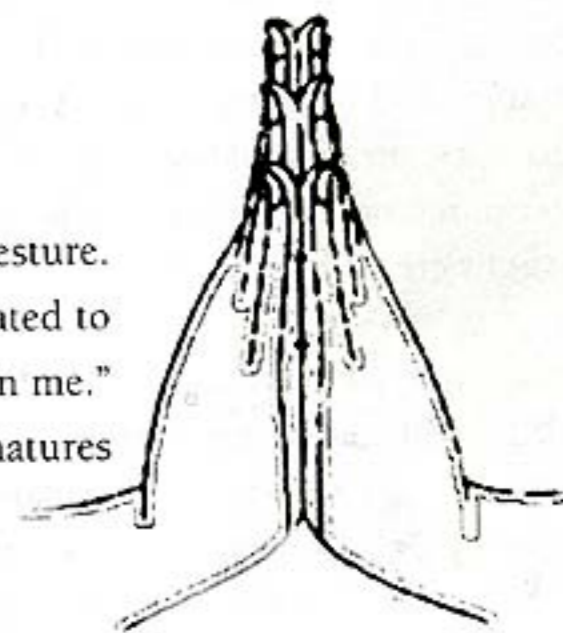
Linga Mudra - entwine (cross-link) all fingers of both hands keeping thumb straight.

- Increases fire element in the body
- Useful in cold and cough ailments



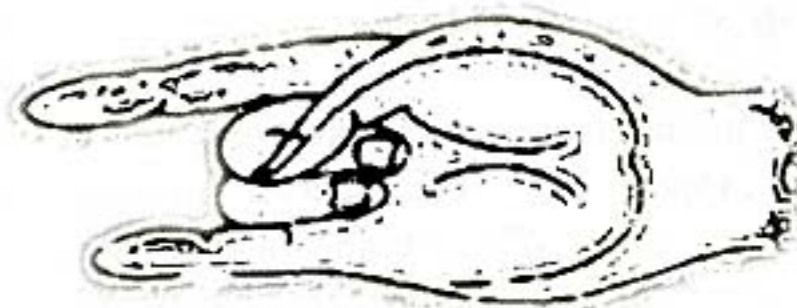
Anjali or Namaskar Mudra – used world-wide, the prayer gesture.

- An honoring greeting sometimes translated to "I bow to the divinity within you from the divinity within me."
- The yoking of active and receptive natures



Tarjani or Abhaya Mudra

- A gesture to ward off evil
- A signal telling one not to fear



So how do mantra, mudra and the sound of Aum play in a yogi's hatha practice?

There are many resources available for research on these expressions, both in books and on the internet. None of the interpretations are fixed; rather it is left to the experience of the practitioner to ultimately come to his or her own judgment.

Often during a hatha practice one opens to, or connects with, varying kinds of energies, emotions and feelings. They may express themselves as memory, sound or vibration, and many times one will spontaneously create a form of mantra and/or mudra.

If we look at our hatha practice as a continuous exploration in this hard-to-define field called energy, then the addition of the mantra,

the Om meditation and the mudras are, in essence, new or re-called pigments that we put on our never-ending palette to creating that ever-unfolding masterpiece called – us. ☪

"May we realize a peace that depends on...nothing. Paul Reynolds is an all-levels Hatha Vinyasa teacher on the island of Kava'i. His current teaching schedule can be found at www.unlimited-ideas.com or call Paul at 650-773-3422.