

THE SCIENCE OF MANTRA

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

The gods are in the heavens. Our relationship with the gods is a daily affair. Not a moment passes when this relation is absent. Similar to an inverted upside-down tree, for instance, creation evolves through various degrees of subtlety as the great root, becoming the powerful trunk and then descending into the diversity of the branches, the tiny twigs and the leaves, down to the final tips of its lowest level of manifestation. The higher connections in this tree determine the functions of the lower manifestations, as the sap in the larger trunk would decide the way in which it sustains its further ramifications and the control it exerts even till the tips of its leaves.

The sap is tremendously concentrated in the root and the trunk. It is distributed in a proportionate manner through the gradations of further ramification, and the very same central oceanic sap which is the vitality of the tree feeds everything that it is made of. The only difference is the power, the intensity and the pressure of this sap manifesting itself, getting decreased and diluted as it comes further and further down, although it is permeating through every last leaf.

The gods are in heaven as our subtle body is above this physical body and the causal body is above the subtle body. Layers of our personality, several in number, do not merely overlap in a physical sense, but remain as succeeding and

preceding elements, we may say, as effects and causes, in the scheme of the hierarchy of the manifestation of the cosmic power. There is a tremendous network of these relations. This universe is such a fabric of interrelated threads of power, tiny streams of force, whose determinations are guided by the extent of their transcendence or descent, as the case may be, in this scheme of the vast manifestation.

The determining power is more inclusive and intense in the higher regions. The higher gods are supposed to be greater than the lower gods. The distinction between a god in heaven and a person on earth is the distinction between the constituent material of the personality of the god or the human individual concerned. The physical element is stably sitting upon all inhabitants of the earth. Material constraint is all-in-all in every living being on this earth, but the higher ranges of beings free themselves gradually from this involvement in material constraint; and the gods are supposed to be either predominantly watery, fiery or airy, or they can be even subtler than we can conceive in terms of these elements.

The penetrating capacity of a divinity depends upon the subtlety of the matter that goes into the constitution of the divinity. The higher gods are higher in the same sense as space is higher than air, air is higher than fire, fire is higher than water, water is higher than earth. This gradation of something being higher is to be understood in the sense of the difference in the density of the manifestation of power, which is at once the density of manifestation of intelligence. Knowledge and power go together. The higher gods are more intelligent and more powerful; the lesser gods are less intelligent and less powerful.

To come back to our simple analogy of the branches of an inverted tree, the powerful branches have greater energy in them coming from the central roots or the trunk than the little twigs and the sagging leaves, though all of them have the benefit of receiving the sap in differently distributed proportions. This world is arranged in the pattern of several

layers of power; and while this is so, there is also an arrangement of the diversity of these layers of arrangement. Therefore, there is a twofold way of envisaging this manifestation downward from the Supreme Being. There is a coming down gradually into the lower levels of comprehensiveness, inclusiveness, intelligence and power on the one hand; and on the other hand, there is a greater and greater tendency to diversification, as in the case with a tree and its branches. The tree becomes more and more diversified through its ramifications as it moves further and further onwards, downwards.

The gods, therefore, are our own higher nature. Sometimes we are told that the gods are residing in us, in our own selves. This is like saying the entire power of the tree is also in a leaf. To some extent, this is a great truth. The power of the government can be seen even in the lowest official; he may be a village head. It is manifest in a very little modicum, almost insignificantly present, incapable of functioning, as it were, but it is a little slumbering spark which can be ignited by circumstances that can raise it up to the capacity of connecting itself with the higher powers.

Thus is our interesting relation to the higher divinities. The gods are not imaginations of the mind. Heaven is not a concoction of the brain of a man. It is a supremely real specific manifestation differentiated in two ways, as I mentioned: firstly, differentiated through the density in the process of the descent and secondly, differentiated by the diversity that is characteristic of the manifestation, whereby a particular manifestation can be said to be either higher or lower, as the case may be.

These gods being essentially mental in their nature, free from the shackles of the physical earth to which we are mostly bound, can be contacted only by intense mental concentration. The mind is the stuff of the divinity, though even the stuff of this mind varies in its intensity and comprehensiveness, as already pointed out. But the matchstick-like potentiality of divinity that is present in our

own lowest level also can manifest from within itself that energy which can reach up to the highest divinity through the hierarchy of the gods.

Our contact with the gods is through the substance out of which they are made, and incidentally through the substance in us which is akin to their nature. A kinship has to be established between ourselves and the divinities, the angels, the gods, the demigods, the archangels – call them by whatever name we like. The kinship that is there between ourselves and these higher manifestations is in terms of vibrations. The mind, so to say, is also a concentrated form of vibration. It is a force that is whirling, gyrating in a particular manner. In human beings and in other living beings in the world, it is made to whirl in a particular manner in terms of desire for sense contact and desire for physical maintenance, etc. And the whirl is intensified in terms of its centre of self-affirmation, called the ego, the ego also being a whirl of force. Like the nucleus in an atom, the ego is in the centre of our personality; and the wings, as it were, of this nucleus of the atom of human personality are the processes of thinking, like electronic energy moving towards the nucleus, and also moving from it.

The ego is the nucleus of mental power; and the functions of the mind in terms of desire, contact with objects, etc., may be compared to the exterior pattern of the atom, so that the human individual is atomic in a social sense, in a psychological sense. This very same mind – which is so hard in its core of egoism in the human individual mostly, due to the tremendous pressure of affirmation which characterises it – is supposed to diffuse itself into a larger inclusiveness and dimension as it envisages its connection with a higher content of its own. This we call the higher mind or the higher reason, through which it is that we are able to contact the higher powers.

The vibrations of the gods and the vibrations of the concentrating mind should be in a state of en rapport. We can contact even Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva at once, inasmuch as

there is no geographical distance between the outer periphery of an atom and the inner nucleus of it. The distance is logical, not geographical. We may even say conceptual, rational, and measurable only in terms of consciousness.

The distance between ourselves and the gods is a distance that is created by consciousness itself. To understand how consciousness can create an apparently geographical distance, we may only have to go back to the analogy of our dream world, where we can see a distant mountain looking several miles away from the perceiver thereof, notwithstanding the fact that there is no such physical distance between the perceiving or the dreaming individual and the mountain that is seen. The space is only conceptual, yet it looks like a physical distance.

The gods appear to be very far off from us. We do not know how far Gabriel is, Michael is, the archangel is, Narayana, Nara, Vasishtha, Vyasa, the residents of the higher regions of Janarloka, Taparloka. How far is it? We will be wonderstruck with the astonishment of there being an infinite distance between ourselves and these great beings. Awestruck, indeed! We will be as if they are as far as the stars in the sky. But they are as far from us as our causal body is from our own selves, or our mind is away from our body.

The world has no physical distance. The whole universe which is created by God is not physical in its nature. It is not possible to measure it by a yardstick or a foot ruler, or any other chain that we have got physically. Tremendous distance there is, and yet it is no distance at all.

The contact through the modes of vibration with the gods in one particular mode of spiritual practice, or *sadhana*, is done through mantra *japa*. The gods are supposed to be definable through a mantra. A mantra is the name of a god. It is a name of the very structure of the divinity. Sometimes it is emphasised that the mantra itself is the god. The recitation of a mantra, the invocation of the inner potential of the mantra through correct pronunciation, is at once the invocation of

the divinity because according to mantra *sastra*, the opinion is that the divinity or the god is nothing but the shape or the pattern that the vibration of the mantra takes when it is correctly pronounced. A geometrical pattern may be created when a particular mantra, a *bheja* or otherwise, is recited as required. That pattern is the visualisation of the god – the shape that the vibration takes, as it were, in the field of outer perception; and we can see the god as we can see our own self in a dream world. But this vision of God, the divinity or the *Ishta Devata* or the god that we worship through the mantra, is inseparable basically from the stuff of the meditating consciousness itself, and the blessing of this god upon the reciter of the mantra is virtually the higher self blessing the lower self.

Various gods have been mentioned in the mantra *sastras*. There is a large compilation called a Mantra Maharnava; ‘An Ocean of Mantras’ is the name of that book. All kinds of mantras are described, with their mode of application, like we may have mathematical formulae for the manufacture of different kinds of nuclear warheads or weapons. The formulae change according to the requirement on hand. So a particular mantra of a god is a formula. It is a mathematical equation, as it were, which conjures up a hidden energy and releases it into action, and the mantra does what we expect it to do.

The mantra *japa*, therefore, is a sacred act of the spiritual seeker. It is not merely a verbal audible utterance of a word or a linguistic formula. It is a preparation for going inward into the very power with which we are able to vocalise or articulate the mantra.

The four stages of sound are perhaps well known to everybody – *para*, *pashanti*, *madhyama* and *vaikari*. *Vaikari* is the audible sound that we make when we recite a mantra. But it is connected to the vocal organs which move in that given manner on account of a pressure that is exerted by another thing which is not audible or sensory. That is the background. The *tanmatric* element of that is perhaps there

at the back of the physical operation of the sound which is the actual chanting of the mantra. This is what they call *madhyama* in one particular style of speaking. But there are deeper roots of the very origin of this sound, going to the deeper plexuses of the psychic personality. *Pashanti* is the word that is used. And lastly there is an inaudible sound, *amatra*. *Amatra* is a sound that cannot be heard. It, therefore, cannot be called a sound at all.

As space is not a solid object, it does not seem to be existing at all, for all practical purposes. Yet it is scientifically possible to convert hard matter into liquefied, gaseous and spatial forms. It is possible to conceive of the possibility of an inaudible soundless *amatra* state of sound that is made vocal and articulate when we chant the mantra. Like high potencies of homeopathic medicine, where it is said that the medicine is not at all there, there is something called vibration which is quite different from the mother tincture.

In a similar manner is the energy that we can invoke in our own selves by a mental cooperation with the actual reciting of the mantra through the vocal organs. It is not necessary for us to struggle hard to understand what kind of god may be there in front of the mantra; the god will manifest itself automatically. When a particular chemical combination is swallowed, its definite action will be palpable. Everybody will know what particular effect will be there through a particular given chemical combination, and he need not theoretically argue about it.

This is also the importance of *diksha*, or an initiation that is required in the case of the recitation of a mantra, because *diksha* initiation into the mantra is the actual introducing of the mind of a student into the technique of audition and also mentation, both of which are involved in the chanting of the mantra.

We should not take mantra *japa* as a light affair. People generally say, "Some *japa* I do when I walk. Some *japa* I do when I sit, some when I recline, some when I go to bed." We should not be so very careless in our respect that is due to

these mantras. Mantras are like persons. They will stand before us and speak. And, to repeat, a mantra is not a sound. It is a vibration that is created in terms of the shape that it will take and in terms of an action that we produce, which is actually the work of the god that we think of.

There are gradations of mantras, the lower and the higher; and we hear of the lower gods and the higher gods. It is said that it is easier to manifest a lesser god and more difficult it is to manifest a higher god because of the fact of there being a greater concentration necessary in the case of a higher god - a *sattvic* god, we may say, rather than a *rajasic* or a *tamasic* element - and greater purification of the mind is called for in the case of the actualisation of the mantra of a higher god.

Sheer will works in many cases. Purity or impurity, that is a different matter. A person who is full of gross desires may also manifest some power by the strength of will and concentration, but this is not what we speak of, in the spiritual field at least, when we refer to mantra *siddhi*. Mere willpower may bring some result; but at the back of it, there is an ardent asking for a lower contact with the desired objects and, therefore, that may bring about the fall, as they call it, of the seeker - draining oneself and also draining others connected with oneself.

It is, therefore, necessary to see that the mind is kept pure. And, especially in the case of a spiritual seeker, the mantra *japa* should be resorted to for the purpose of the pleasure of the god, to receive the blessing of the divinity and not to expect an ulterior materialisation of any kind in terms of that divinity. 'Ulterior' means something other than God Himself - expecting the divinity to do something for us other than being satisfied with the divinity itself. Therefore, to use a mantra as a tool for the implementation of a lower desire or any kind of externalised impulse would be uncalled for in actual spiritual practice.

The mantras in the Mantra Maharnava, to which I made reference, refer to well-known gods: Maha Ganapati, Durga,

Lakshmi, Saraswati, Siva or Rudra, Narayana or Vishnu, Surya, Skanda or Karthikeya, and even other gods like Hanuman, Ayyappan, and any other conceivable divinity. Thousands of them may be conceived in our minds. And as infinite permutations and combinations of a particular compound are possible, infinite mantras also are possible. We may concede that there are infinite gods.

But this infinitude of the gods is like the infinitude of the leaves of a tree, twigs of an inverted huge manifestation; and they, notwithstanding being manifold and infinite in number, are all one at the root, as the sea is one behind various ripples, eddies, gyrations of water. The spiritual seeker should take to *japa sadhana*, as it is mostly said that it is on the one hand a very easy method of practice; and secondly, the Bhagavad Gita, the great gospel, tells us *yajnanam japa-yajno'smi* (Gita 10.25): Of all the dedications, consecrations, sacrifices, worships and adorations that one can think of, *japa* is the best because *japa* is the calling of the name of a dear beloved one. And here the dear, beloved one is our god. Don't we feel happy when we call the name of a dear one? That happiness is the power that will see to the manifestation of the god. If the love for the divinity is absent, if it is done as a mechanical routine of ritual, the heart not being there, it will be a dreary journey through the days and days of spiritual practice. The love of God is the power that is behind the *sadhana shakti*. *Sadhana shakti* is the power that is generated by the intense concentration arising out of intense longing.

The fourteen worlds - Bhurloka, Bhuvarkala, Svarloka, Maharloka, Janarloka, Tapoloka and Satyaloka - are the levels of the concentration of force, as there can be levels of concentration of force in water. There can be ice on the surface of the sea, and that very solidity of the tip of the ice may be seen gradually, imperceptibly, as it were, to melt down into a liquid form at the root; and water can even become gaseous and utterly invisible. The solidity, liquidity and the gaseous conditions of a single substance are not differentiated by physical distance, yet are measurable by the

internal difference in the causation that they maintain. Thus we are perpetually guarded by the divinities, protected by them, superintended by the very divinities; and inasmuch as there is no geographical distance between the gods concerned and ourselves, they are able to act instantaneously upon ourselves.

Surya Narayana is supposed to be the superintending principle over the eye. We may wonder, "What kind of control can Surya exert on my eye? Ninety-three million miles away is the sun, and I am here." This ninety-three million miles of distance is no distance for the sun. There is an electromagnetic relationship between objects even of immense distances; and these actions of invisible forces defying physical distance are not capable of description by purely mathematical formulae.

Our sense organs, which are five in number – eyes, ears, nose, palate and the tactile sense, which constitute practically our individuality and sensation, our very life itself – all these five are directly controlled by the cosmical counterparts, which are the gods. They are touching us. The divinity is touching the very skin and the very eye and the very nose and the ear and the palate, without whose actions we will not eat anything, will not taste anything, will not be visualising anything or hearing anything.

In a way, we may say that God Himself is working through us. And to the extent that God is beneficent, to the extent that we are able to allow the entry of the power of this God, in that proportion we are very vigorous in our sense organs, healthy in our body and mind. And to the extent we block the entry of these forces, we are debilitated both physically and mentally. When the body becomes old and is decaying, the energies of the gods get withdrawn gradually. A dying man starts blinking, and he will not be able to see. Afterwards, he cannot hear; then he cannot speak; then he cannot think. Then finally the *prana* withdraws itself into the cosmic *prana*, and he goes where he is destined to go.

The mantra *sastra*, therefore, is a great treasure house of wisdom that is bequeathed to us by the great masters; and all students, spiritual seekers, should take to *japa*. Abstract meditation, *nirguna brahma sadhana*, may be a great object of aspiration, but we are *artharathi*, caught by the worldly conditions and circumstances, distracted in many ways socially and personally.

We can be safely guarded and assured that some substantial thing is being done by us by taking to *japa sadhana*. A systematic routine of it is supposed to bring immediate results in the same way as a diet that we take in a systematic manner gives energy to the body, and if we go on eating in a slipshod manner, at any time we like, in any way, that will not be suitable for the maintenance of health. Discipline means the adherence to a particular method of practice of the *japa*, such as place, time and circumstance, if it is possible.

In the case of people living in the ashram, for instance, it is certainly possible. They can do *japa* at a particular place only - in their own rooms, in the temple, or in the Samadhi Shrine hall. Every day the *japa* will be done in the same place and at the same time. Space-time collocations being very important in an astronomical way, they act upon us. The cyclic way in which nature moves will see that the adherence to space and time will also add to the success of the spiritual practice; and the method which is the circumstance mentioned is also important. We can successfully adhere to the place and the time, no doubt, but it is necessary also to adhere to the method and the mode of operating the mind at that time, with the requisite *sankalpa*, which in the case of a spiritual seeker should only be blessing, and nothing more or nothing else.

The placement of oneself mentally and psychologically and the maintenance of a particular mood during the *japa* is the circumstance mentioned. And the same mood must be maintained. One *purasharana* of a particular mantra is supposed to bring practically a tangible result. A

purasharana is the recitation of a mantra in a systematic manner for as many hundred thousand times (*lakh* of times) as there are letters in a mantra. And this is noted by a disciple when initiation is received. Other disciplines which are of the nature of an accessory such as taking a particular kind of diet, etc., taking bath, etc., may be there, but they are secondary in their nature.

The principle requirement here is the place, time and concentration method, and taking to the *purasharana* method and not merely chanting for a few minutes, because the mind will not be able to cooperate with the reciting of the mantra if it is done only for a few minutes. The mind will be apart from the actual chant, and we will be somewhere else. This is the reason why more time is to be devoted to mantra *japa*, so that the mind may be given an opportunity to collaborate with the actual sound, and the consciousness also will be in back of it.

Thus, we have a vast field of knowledge before us, the mantra *sastra*, and the mantra *japa sadhana*, which to me appears as the most potent method of contacting the higher powers - the gods in the heaven, the Supreme Being Himself. *Yajnanam japa-yajno'smi* (Gita 10.25): "I am myself this great sacrifice called *japa sadhana*," says the Almighty Lord.

*Om purnam adah purnam idam purnat purnam udachyate
purnasya purnam adaya purnam evavashishyate.*

OM shantih shantih shantih