

Japa Yoga

by Swami Sivananda

Japa is an important limb of Yoga. In the Gita you will find: "Yajnanam Japa-Yajnosmi-Among Yajnas I am Japa Yajna." In this Kali Yuga practice of Japa alone can give eternal Peace, Bliss and Immortality. Japa ultimately results in Samadhi or communion with God. Japa must become habitual and must be attended with Sattvic Bhava, Purity, Prem and Sraddha. There is no Yoga greater than Japa-Yoga. It can bestow upon you all Ishta-Siddhis (whatever you want), Bhakti and Mukti.

A Mantra is Divinity. It is Divine Power or Daivi-Sakti manifesting in a sound body. The Sastra says that those who think that an image is a mere stone, that Mantras are merely letters, and that a Guru is a mere man and not a manifestation and representative of the Lord or Supreme Teacher, Illustrator and Director, go to hell. The aspirant should endeavour to realise his unity with the Mantra or the Divinity and to the extent he does so, the Mantra-Sakti supplements his worship-power (Sadhana-Sakti).

Japa is the repetition or recital of a Mantra or the Name of the Lord. Dhyana is the meditation on the form of the Lord with His attributes. This is the difference between Japa and Dhyana. There is Japa with meditation (Japa-Sahita) and without meditation (Japa-Rahita). As you advance, the Japa will drop by itself and meditation alone will remain. It is no doubt an advanced stage. You can practise concentration separately. You can do whatever you like best.

Om is both Saguna and Nirguna Brahman. You can repeat 'Om Ram' for worship of the Saguna Brahman. Om is everything. Om is the name or symbol of God, Isvara or Brahman. Om is your real name. Om covers all the three-fold experiences of man. Om stands for all the phenomenal worlds. From Om this sense-universe has been projected. The world exists in Om and dissolves in Om. Om is derived by adding the letters A+U+M. 'A' represents the physical plane, 'U' represents the mental and the astral plane, the world of spirits, all heavens, and 'M' represents all the deep sleep state as well as in your wakeful state all that is unknown and beyond the reach of the intellect. Om therefore represents all. Om is the basis of your life, thought and intelligence. Om is the centre of all worlds that denote objects. Hence the whole world has come out from Om, rests in Om, and dissolves in Om. As soon as you sit for meditation, chant Om loudly 3 or 6 or 12 times. This will drive away all worldly thoughts from the mind and remove tossing of mind (Vikshepa). Then take to mental repetition of Om.

In the act of breathing, the greatest Mantra SOHAM is repeated automatically by the Jiva 21, 600 times within 24 hours. This is called Ajapa Mantra. That is to say, it is a Mantra that is repeated without Japa or willed effort of the Jiva. Breath goes out with HAM and comes in with SO. Soham is Om only. Delete S and H, the consonants. The balance is OM. Soham is the Mantra of a Vedantic student. It means: "I am He" or "He am I. " This signifies the identity of Jiva and Brahman. Repetition of this Mantra "HAMSAH SOHAM-SOHAM HAMSAH adds force to the Japa as is the case in "GOD IS LOVE-LOVE IS GOD. " In the same way the Mahavakya is repeated "Aham Brahma Asmi-Brahmaivaham Asmi. "

A Mantra in the Hindu religion has a Rishi who gave it; a metre which governs the inflection of the voice; and a Devata as its informing power. The Beeja (seed) is a significant word or series of words which give it a special power. Sometimes this word is a sound which harmonises with the key-note of the individual using it and varies with the individual. Sometimes this word expresses the essence of the flower springing from this seed. This essence of the Gita is in the words quoted. The Sakti is the energy of the form of the Mantra i. e. , the vibration-forms set up by its sounds. These in the Gita carry the man to the Lord. The pillar (Kilakam) is that which supports and makes the Mantra strong. This is the ceasing from sorrow by the freeing from imperfections.

Then follow certain special directions intended to set up relations between the centres in the man's body and the corresponding centres in the body of the Lord (the universe). The thumbs, the earth-symbol, are connected with the physical plane and are utilised in control of its subtle forces. The index fingers, the water-symbol, are connected with the astral plain and are similarly used with astral forces. The middle fingers, the fire-symbol, the apex of the pyramid of the hand, are also similarly used with mental forces. The ring fingers, the air-symbol, are used with Buddhic forces. The little fingers, the most powerful in the subtle worlds, are the Akasa-symbol and are similarly used with Atmic-forces. The other organs of the body are the other poles of the magnet of the body: thumbs and heart; index fingers and head; middle fingers and the point of juncture of the occipital and parietal sutures; the ring fingers and the Sukshma Sarira; the little fingers and the creative organ. These are the positive and negative poles of the magnet we call the body; either may be positive, either negative according to the object aimed at, but they work together.

There is a special, mysterious force or wonderful magnetic power at Sandhi or junction time (sunrise and sunset). The mind will be elevated quickly. It will be filled with Sattva. Concentration will come by itself without any effort at this time. Japa should be done at Sandhis. It is always better to start Japa and meditation at 4 in the morning as soon as you get up from the bed. At this time the mind is quite calm and refreshed. This is the time to catch the meditative wave. Meditation is more important. Then you can take to Asanas and Pranayama and wind up the full course by another short sitting in Japa and meditation. As there is always some drowsiness when you get up and start the practice, it is desirable to do some Asanas and a little Pranayama for five minutes just to drive off this drowsiness and to make yourself fit for Japa and meditation.

The mind gets one-pointedness after the practice of Pranayama. Therefore you will have to take to Japa and meditation after Pranayama is over. Pranayama, though it concerns with the breath, gives good exercise to the various internal organs and the whole body. It is the best of physical exercises known.

Fixing one's eyes between the two eye-brows (Bhrumadhya-Drishti) is an important exercise for the aspirant. Sit on your favourite Asana in your meditation room and practise this gaze gently for half a minute and gradually increase it to half an hour. There should not be any violence in this practice. This Yogic Kriya removes tossing of mind and what is most astonishing, develops concentration. Lord Krishna prescribes this practice. "Sparsan kritva bahir bahyam-chakshuh-chaivantare bhruvoh -Shutting out (all) external contacts and fixing the gaze between the eye-brows. " (Gita: V-27.) This is known as the "frontal gaze. " Sit on your favourite Asana as said before and gently fix your gaze at the tip of the nose from half a minute to half an hour. Do not strain your eyes. This is also prescribed by Lord Krishna in the Gita. You can select either the "nasal gaze" on the "frontal gaze" according to your taste, temperament and capacity.

Some students like to concentrate with open eyes, while some others with closed eyes, while yet some others with half-opened eyes. If you meditate with closed eyes, dust or foreign matter will not injure your eyes. Some students whom lights and jerks trouble, prefer concentration with open eyes. In some who meditate with closed eyes, sleep overpowers within a short time. Use your commonsense and adopt that which suits you best. Overcome other obstacles by suitable, intelligent methods. Remember the story of "Bruce and the Spider. " Be patient and persevering. You will have to struggle hard and win the spiritual battle, become a spiritual hero and wear spiritual laurels round your neck.

Loud Japa shuts out all worldly sounds. There is no break. These are the two advantages in loud Japa. In Manasic Japa it is difficult to find when the break comes in the mind in the case of majority of people. Whenever sleep tries to overpower you when you do Japa at night, take the Japa-Maala in your hands and roll the beads. This will put a check to sleep. Repeat the Mantra loudly. Give up Manasic Japa. Now the Maala will remind you when the stoppage takes place. When sleep is hard to overcome, stand up and do the Japa.

Silent repetition of God's Name such as HARI OM or SRI RAM is a potent tonic for all diseases. It should never be stopped even for a day under any circumstances. It is like food. It is a spiritual food for the hungry soul. Lord Jesus says: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. " You can drink and live on the nectar that flows during Japa and meditation. Even simple mechanical repetition of a Mantra has got very great effect. It purifies the mind. It serves as a gatekeeper. It intimates to you that some other worldly thoughts have entered now. At once you can try to drive these thoughts and make Smarana of the Mantra. Even during the mechanical repetition, a portion of the mind is there.

If you utter the word "excreta" or "urine" when your friend is taking his meal, he may at once vomit his food. If you think of "Garam Pakoda" your tongue will get salivation. There is a Sakti in every word. When such is the case with ordinary words, what about the Names of the Lord? Repetition or thinking of His Name produces tremendous influence on the mind. It transforms the mental substance-Chitta-overhauls the vicious, old Samskaras in the mind, transmutes the Asuric diabolical nature and brings the devotee face to face with God. There is no doubt of this. O sceptic and scientific atheists! Wake up, wake up. Open your eyes. Chant His Name always. Sing and do Kirtan.

A Maala contains 108 beads. You must increase the number of Japa (recitation of the Name of the Lord) from 200 to 500 Malas. Just as you are very keen in taking your food twice daily, tea in the morning and cocoa in the evening, you must evince extreme keenness in doing Japa also 4 times: morning, noon, evening and night. Death may come at any moment, without a second's notice. Prepare yourself to meet it with a smile uttering SRI RAM, SRI RAM and merging in RAM-in Eternal Bliss, in Infinite Glory, Ananda and Self-knowledge. Even on tour you must do Japa and reading of the Gita. Do you not eat and drink on your tour? Don't become ungrateful to the Inner Ruler (Antaryamin), who gives your daily bread and looks after you in every way. You can do Japa even in latrines. But do it mentally. Ladies can do Japa mentally even during the monthly periods. There are no restrictions in Japa for those who do it with Nishkamyā Bhava, for the attainment of Moksha. Restrictions come only when people repeat any Mantra with Sakama Bhava to get fruits such as wealth, Svarga, son etc. You can wear Maala around your neck while answering the calls of nature also.

If you are a very busy man and if you lead a travelling life always, you need not have a special room and a special time for meditation. Do SOHAM Japa and Dhyana along with the breath. This is very easy. Or associate Rama Mantra along with the breath. Then every moment of breath will become a prayer and a meditation. Remember "SOHAM. " Feel His presence everywhere. This will suffice.

Sri Rama's Ishta Devata was Lord Siva. So a Bhakta of Rama should repeat "Om Namah Sivaya", the Mantra of Lord Siva, for six months in the beginning. He can have Rama's Darshan quickly. If you become sleepy during Japa, stand up for half an hour and do Japa. Sleep will pass off. Dash some cold water on the face. At night live on half a seer of milk and some fruits. Heavy diet makes you drowsy.

In 14 hours you can do 2000 Malas of HARI OM Japa. In 7 hours you can do Japa of one lakh of SRI RAM Mantra. In half an hour you can do 10, 000 SRI RAM Japa. If you do Japa of a Mantra 13 crores of times you will have Darshan of your Ishta Devata in physical form. If you are sincere and earnest you can do this in four years' time.

Nama (name) and Rupa (the object signified by the name) are inseparable. Thought and word are inseparable. Whenever you think of the name of your son, his figure will stand before your mental eye and vice versa. Even so when you do Japa of Rama Rama or Krishna Krishna, the picture of Rama or Krishna will come before your mind. Therefore Japa and Dhyana go together inseparably.

The rosary (Maala) is a whip to goad you towards God. Just as the ideas of courts, cases, documents and clients are associated when you see or think of a lawyer, so also the ideas of Sanctity, Purity, Divinity, Glory, Splendour, Wisdom, Power, Love, Omnipotence etc. , are associated when you see or think of a Maala. Therefore wear this always round your neck and do Japa. Don't feel shy to wear this, O educated persons! It will always remind you of God and God-realisation. It is even more valuable than your necklace bedecked with nine precious gems, because it fills your mind with divine thoughts and acts as an instrument to take you to the goal.

Some can do Manasic Japa more quickly than others. The mind becomes dull after some hours. It cannot turn out the work of Japa efficiently. The speed becomes lessened. Those who calculate the Malas of Japa according to the watch should take recourse to rolling the beads if there be any such dullness. If there be any pain in twirling the beads, you can use the bag for holding the fingers. This gives rest to the hand.

It is always better to take to medium speed. It is not the speed but the Bhava and concentration that bring about the maximum benefits in Japa. There must be Akshara Suddhi in repetition. Every word must be pronounced very, very clearly. There must be no mutilation of any word. This is important. Some people finish one lakh of Japa daily within seven hours in a hurried manner just as a hired carpenter or contractor does the work in order to get the wages. Don't have any contract work with God. There cannot be any real devotion in having any contract with God. There is one advantage in doing Japa with electric speed. If the mind is dull, if the mind is wandering wildly in sensual objects you can keep up very high speed for 15 or 20 minutes. This will stimulate the dull mind and bring it back quickly to the focusing point.

Those who take recourse to Purascharana and keeping up of daily diary should be very exact and accurate in keeping the record. There must be mathematical accuracy. They should watch the mind very carefully and if it becomes dull during Japa they should do more Japa till dullness vanishes. It is better to take into consideration the number of Japa that is done when the mind is in full spirit and to omit that which is done when the mind is lethargic. This is erring on the safe side.

Three kinds of Japa

Sandilya says in Sandilya Upanishad, "The Vaikhari Japa (loud pronunciation) gives the reward as stated in the Vedas; while the Upamsu Japa (whispering or humming which cannot be heard by any one) gives a reward a thousand times more than the Vaikhari; the Manasic Japa gives a reward a crore of times more than the Vaikhari. "

May God give us inner strength and courage to control the Indriyas and the mind and to practise Japa Yoga quite uninterruptedly! May we have unshakable faith in the miraculous power and marvellous benefits of Japa Yoga! May we all recognise and realise the glory of God's Name! May we all spread the glory of the Lord's Name throughout the length and breadth of the land! Victory to Hari and His Name! Glory to Hari and His Name! May the blessings of Sri Siva-Hari-Rama-Krishna be upon us all!