



Om Namah
Shivaya...

Practice Intentionality & Presence with Mantram Repetition

by JILL E. BORMANN PhD, RN, FAAN

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When was the last time you *really* listened to someone with undivided and full attention? Were you present in that moment, without thoughts of what you needed to do next? Could you listen without trying to finish the other person's sentences? If your answer is "no," then you may be a good candidate for mantram repetition.

"What is a mantram?" you ask. "Isn't it called a *mantra*?" Before answering these questions, I acknowledge that there are many opinions and teachings about the best ways to calm the mind, meditate, manage stress, stay mindful, and be present with others. Each person must find the method or practice that works best for him/her. For those who have never tried *any* meditative practices, however, mantram repetition may be a good place to start.

A mantram, or mantra, (either spelling has the same meaning in Sanskrit) is a word or phrase defined as a "short, powerful spiritual formula . . . used to call up what is best and deepest in ourselves" (Easwaran, 2008a, p.12). The phrase *mantram repetition* was introduced to the West by Sri Eknath Easwaran (see sidebar at right) as part of his Eight-Point Program (Easwaran, 2008b).

There are many commonly recommend mantrams to choose from, but it is important to select one for yourself to match your personal philosophy and spiritual needs. Silently repeating a mantram is a portable, contemplative practice that can be exercised nearly any time or place, without needing a quiet environment, specific time period or posture. It is used to

teach your mind to focus, pause and be present, even while on the go!

Benefits of Practicing Mantram Repetition

Repeating a mantram requires intention and focus. When practicing correctly, your mind should have no room for thinking of anything else (so, you know when you are doing it and when you are not). In addition, while practicing mantram mentally, you simultaneously slow down your thought process and develop the skill of concentrating and focusing on just one thing—your mantram.

Mantram repetition is done internally, quietly inside the mind, and requires both commitment and intention. This may be difficult at first, however over time with consistent, daily practice, repeating a mantram builds expertise to direct one's attention at will. It fosters slowing down and being present in the moment. This internal skill of concentration can later be transferred externally to a variety of daily tasks. Thus, the practice of repeating a mantram with intention and focus becomes a means to better concentration on other things in your life, from the mundane (doing dishes) to the sublime (being intimate with a partner). Unlike a motto, pep-talk, inspirational passage or personal affirmation, a mantram embodies a sacred essence, Higher Power, or God's assistance. It is powerful.

Travis and Shear (2010) categorized meditative practices into three types:

- 1) Object-focused such as attention on breath, sound, picture, etc.
- 2) Open-monitoring where attention moves toward whatever comes into one's awareness—thoughts, feelings, physical sensations.
- 3) Transcendent, where focus allows one to move beyond thoughts, as described in Transcendental Meditation (TM).

The practice of mantram repetition involves these first two. It is an object-focused method, but the skills derived

from its practice further develop the ability to capture moment-to-moment awareness, with a bonus of choosing what to stay focused upon. Mantram repetition does not strive to “transcend” consciousness, but instead, makes a person more conscious.

So how can mantram repetition improve intentionality and presence with patients and co-workers? There are three ways it helps:

- 1) Mantram is like a pause button for the mind.
- 2) Mantram brings us immediately into the present moment.
- 3) Mantram strengthens our ability to cultivate presence, active listening, and doing one thing at a time.

Repeating a mantram is an instant reminder to *be here now*. At work, repeat a mantram just a few times before meeting your next patient. Repeat a mantram to refocus yourself before doing a procedure or giving medications. When walking from meeting to meeting, repeat a mantram to give your mind a mini-break from the day's hassles. Repeat it when you notice you are getting anxious or worried about things that are completely out of your control. Repeat it when ruminating on something unnecessary or that you simply cannot deal with right now. A mantram can help block out events that happened yesterday or those that might happen in the future. Use mantram repetition to calm yourself before presenting sad or disturbing news to a patient or family.

Research on Mantram Repetition

Research evidence has shown that mantram repetition is a valuable tool in the workplace (Richards, Oman, Hedberg, Thoresen & Bowden, 2006). Healthcare workers have reported reduced levels of perceived stress, anxiety, anger (Bormann, Becker et al., 2006; Bormann, Oman et al., 2006), and burnout (Leary, Bormann, Smith, Georges, & Andrews, 2013; Yong, Kim, Park, Seo & Swinton, 2011). They have also reported improved spiritual well-

A Few Examples of Commonly Recommended Mantrams

- *Rama* meaning “eternal joy within” from Mahatma Gandhi
- *Om Shanti* meaning “eternal peace” from Hinduism
- *Jesus* or *Ave Maria* from Christianity
- *Ribono Shel Olam* meaning “Master of the Universe” from Judaism
- *O Wankan Tanka* meaning “O Great Spirit”
- and many others...

About Easwaran

Sri Eknath Easwaran (1910-1999) was a spiritual teacher and author from India, who introduced the concept of mantram repetition to Western culture. His method of Passage Meditation and his Eight-Point Program (Easwaran, 2008b) has been taught to audiences around the world. Easwaran founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in Tomales, California, which continues to preserve and perpetuate his work. To learn more, visit www.easwaran.org

being and quality of life (Leary et al., 2013; Yong et al., 2011). Presence has been more difficult to study, but recently Dr. Carol Kostovich (2012) developed a valid and reliable measure called the Presence of Nursing Scale (PONS). More research on mantram repetition is being planned using the PONS.

In conclusion, let mantram repetition become a habit in your life, and it can serve as a steady friend. It can improve your ability to be present and intentional with others. Best of all, a mantram can be repeated at any time,

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any place, and anywhere. It is particularly useful when waiting in elevators, when walking or exercising, and especially before falling asleep at night. Make sure you use it at times when you need it, as well as those times when you do not. Then, it will be there for you instantly. It is readily available, quickly implemented, sustainable, and a very effective tool for living in the “now.” Give it a try!

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Jill E. Bormann PhD, RN, FAAN is a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Adult Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing and the Associate Nurse Executive for Research at the VA San Diego Healthcare System. She holds adjunct faculty positions within the Schools of Nursing at the University of San Diego and San Diego State University. After completing a VA post-doctoral fellowship in 2001, she has been conducting research on the health outcomes of the Mantram Repetition Program in a variety of groups. She has published numerous studies on mantram repetition with diverse populations, including adults with HIV/AIDS, Veterans with chronic illnesses, family caregivers of Veterans with dementia, healthcare providers, first-time military mothers, and Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



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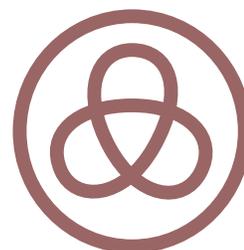
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