



Shree Shree Maa Anandamayee Archieve

DIALOGUES ON JAPA

Q. What is Japa?

A. Repeated recitation of a word or words, Mantra or name of God in particular is called *Japa*. It has to be remembered that only mechanical repetitions of mantra or name is not *Japa*. In Yoga Sutra (Aphorisms on Yoga) of *Patanjali* it is said “*Tatjjapam tadartha bhāvanam*” [*Tat*= that (Mantra); *japam*= *Japa*; *tat*=that (Mantra); *artha*=meaning; *bhāvanam*= contemplation] i.e. *Japa* should be done along with contemplation on the meaning of the words/mantra/name. In *Kulārnava Tantra* (one of the core books on Tantra) it is said that the letter *Ja* means *Janmāntara sahareshu krita pāpa pranāshanāt* (for the destruction of sins committed in thousands of births) and *Pa* means *parādeva prakāshācā* (for the manifestation of the ultimate Godhead). *Japa* is practiced to reach spiritual goal.

Q. Is Japa specific for any particular school of Indian spirituality?

A. No. Almost all the schools of religious practice in *Sanātan Dharma* (eternal Dharma; here religion and Dharma are not equated by the author, this will be discussed in some other context) advocate *Japa* as a tool of spiritual practice and use it.

Q. Do other religions adopt Japa as a tool of practice?

A. In Christianity and Sufism constant remembrance of God plays major role in spiritual practice. *Japa* is another name of constant remembrance. In *Shikhism* and *Tāntric Buddhism* *Japa* is also adopted as a spiritual tool.

Q. Are there any references to Japa in the Vedas?

A. As such though there are scanty references to *Japa* in the Vedas, practice of *Japa* in Vedic rituals is not uncommon. In Vedic way of *Yajna* (sacrificial rites in fire) oblations are offered to the fire by repeated utterance of Mantras. This in a way can also be called *Japa*.

Q. What is the difference between Japa and Yajna?

A. A simple definition of *Yajna* is to offer something to God forsaking the propriety on the object offered. *Yajna* is a spiritual rite whereas *Japa* is a spiritual practice.

Q. In chapter 10, Shloka 25, of the Gita lord Krishna said, “Yajnānām japayajnasmi” i.e. of the Yajnas I am Japa Yajna. If by definition Japa differs from Yajna, how can you explain the above quotation?

A. A good question indeed. In *Yajna* oblations are offered to the sacrificial fire in the name of God reciting a Mantra with the words *swāhā* and *na mama* at the end. For example, when an oblation is offered to God *Indra* the Mantra goes like “*Om*

Indrāya swāhā, idam Indrāya na mama” which means – “I offer (the oblation) to *Indra*, this belongs to *Indra* not mine (*na*=not; *mama*=mine). The aims of all *Yajnas* are to please the god. The same is with *Japa* also. Mantras play a most important role in *Yajna* as well as in *Japa*. *Yajnas* are elaborate and rituals intensive. Even any inadvertent lapses in performing the rites will make a *Yajna* futile whereas in *Japa* as such no strict rites and rituals are required for its effectiveness. There are strict scriptural ordains regarding eligibility to perform a *Yajna* whereas *Japa* has universal eligibility.

In the *Gītā* the above saying of Lord Krishna is to glorify simple *Japa* practice over complicated *Yajna* rituals, having no differences as far as ultimate results of both are concerned.

Q. People call *Japa* as *Japayoga*. Is *Japa* a *Yoga*? If yes, how can one equate *Japa* with *Yoga*?

A. Before answering the question let us first try to define the term *Yoga*. The root verb *Yuj* from which the word *Yoga* is derived have several meanings: - (1) *Yuj* = *samādhi*(ultimate dissolution of mind in the supreme consciousness), (2) *Yuj*=*yujir*{to add or connect (one with the ultimate reality)}, (3) *Yuj*= *sanyam* [to restrain (the mind from the various objectivities of the world)]. According to Patanjali the author of *Yoga Sutra* (aphorisms on *Yoga*) “*Yogas̄cittavrittinirodhah*” (*cittavritti*=thought contrast; *nirodhah*=confinement) i.e. *Yoga* is the ultimate cessation of thought contrast. The result of *Japa* goes well with all the meanings of *Yoga*. Naturally, *Japa* can well be defined as *Yoga*. *Japa* is a tool to be in union with the Godhead. *Japa* helps in restraining mental diversions and attaining the state of uni-focal awareness.

Q. What is the difference between *Nāma-Japa* and *Mantra-Japa*?

A. Repetition of a name of God is *Nāma-Japa* and repetition of a Mantra related to God is *Mantra-Japa*. There are no restrictions regarding eligibility of *Nāma-Japa* but according to scriptural ordain a person initiated to a Mantra by his Guru is only eligible for *Mantra-Japa*.

Q. Which of these two is more efficacious?

A. No spiritual practice is futile if performed properly and sincerely. Success of spiritual endeavor depends on the aspirant, not on the paths. Ma used to say “*Āmi jāni nāmei sab hoi*” i.e. “I know that all spiritual aspirations can be fulfilled only by chanting the name of God.” Both *Nāma-Japa* and *Mantra-Japa* are equally important and efficacious spiritual practice. All the great saints like *Ācāyana Mahāprabhu* of Bengal, *Eknāth*, *Tukārām* and *Rāmdās* of Maharastra and *Kabir* were all praise for *Nāma-Japa*. Amongst the contemporary saints of Bengal, *Sri Rāmakrishna*, *Rāmthakur*, *Mahāprabhu Jagatbandhu*, *Sitārāmdās Omkārnāth* and *Ma Anandamayee* always advocated *Nāma-japa* as a simple and effective spiritual practice. A scriptural *Shloka* (Sanskrit couplet) goes like that: -

Harernāma harernāma harernāmaiva kevalam

Kalou nāstaiva nāstaiva nāstaiva gatiranyathā.

In *Kaliyuga* (The Iron Age) there is no other ways but only the name of *Hari* (the Lord) which can give salvation.

Q. What is the difference between *Nāma-Japa* and *Nāma-kirtan*?

A. In both the cases the name of God is repeated. *Nāma-Kirtan* is repeatedly singing the name of God whereas *Nāma-Japa* is repeated recitation of the name of God vocally or mentally. In the Iron Age (*Kaliyuga*) according to the scripture *Kirtan* has special importance. It has been a common saying among the Vaishnavite-schools of spirituality that “*Kalou Keshava kirtanāt*” (*Kalou*=in *Kaliyuga*, *Keshava*=name of Lord *Keahava*, *Kirtanāt*=from singing) i.e. In *Kaliyuga* salvation comes from singing the name of *Keshava* the Lord. Among the followers of Ma Anandamayee a special *Nāma-Kirtan* called as *Nāma-Yajna* is very popular. The names of God “*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama rama Hare Hare*” are sang uninterruptedly by batches of singers from sunset to sunset. During her lifetime Ma used to participate physically in singing the names of the Lord which was most inspiring to the devotees. The *Vaishnavites* very often speak of *Navadhā Bhakti* (*Navadhā*=nine folds, *bhakti*=devotion) i.e. nine folds practices of devotion of which *Kirtan* comes as the second. (1.*Shravanam*=hearing, 2.*Kirtanam*=singing, 3.*Smaranam*=remembering, 4.*Padasevanam*=prostration or bowing at the feet,

5.*Arćanam*=worship, 6.*Vandanam*=prayer, 7.*Dāsyam*=to become like a servant, 8.*Sakhyam*=to become like a friend, 9.*Ātmanivedanam*=surrendering the self.)

Q. How can Nāma-Japa lead one to his spiritual goal?

A. The ultimate spiritual goal of an aspirant is to be one with his beloved Godhead. In the worldly ways one finds pleasure in constant remembrance of one's beloved even in physical absentia. The name is the first instrument of remembrance. Along with name comes the form or image in the mind and then come the qualities sequentially. With time and repeated remembrance one enjoys mentally the company of the beloved. This is true in case of God's remembrance also but with a difference. By definition God is the incarnation of all positive and appreciable beauties and goodness whereas in case of human beings there are negative aspects also. These may at times have negative influences in the relation of love. A name is generally used for a person or an object for the purpose of particularization. But a name of God besides particularization is significant for its divine aspects. A blind man with a name *Padmaloćan* (*Padma*=lotus; *loćan*=eye) can well be identified but when this name applies to God, besides particularization, it also means the God having beautiful eyes comparable to a lotus. It can be said that a name of God always accompanies the underlying meaning of the word. There is possibility of improper use of a Proper Noun for a person or thing as far as the underlying meaning of the word is concerned but in case of a name of God a Proper Noun has its proper application and meaning. Ma used to say, "*Nām o nāmi abhed*" (*Nām*= name; *o*=and; *nāmi*=the named; *abhed*=indistinguishable/same) i.e. a name and the named are indistinguishable. In *Kankālmālini Tantra* it is said "*Kalikāle varārohe japamātram prashasyate*" i.e. O' beautiful one, in the Iron Age only Japa is superior (to all other spiritual practices). *Meru Tantra* says, "*Japa eva Kalou shreyan*" i.e. In the Iron Age only *Japa* is preferable. *Gandharva Tantra* quotes, "*Kevalam japamātreṇa siddhayah siddhikānskinām*" (*Kevalam*=only; *japamātreṇa*=only by doing *Japa*; *siddhayah*=attainment of perfections; *Siddhikānskinām*= those who aspire for spiritual perfections).

Q. God is called in so many names. What are the criteria in selecting name of God for Nāma-Japa?

A. Different names of God signify His different forms, aspects and attributes. It is for the aspirant to select the name he is inclined to or interested in. It reminds me of the few occasions when devotees asked Ma to select a name of God for *Nāma-Japa*. Ma in turn would ask the devotee which name and form of God he loves most and accordingly he was being given the name for *Japa*.

Q. How many types of Japa are there?

A. *Japa* is classified into so many categories of which (1) *Bāhya* (external) and (2) *Abhyantar* (internal) are the main two. *Bāhya Japa* is also called *Vaikhari Japa*. This is the initial stage of *Japa* practice. *Abhyantar Japa* is subtle and superior to *Bāhya Japa*.

Some schools classified *Japa* as (1) *Vyakta* (manifested), (2) *Avyakta* (unmanifested) and (3) *Sukshma* (subtle). *Vyakta Japa* is called as *Vācīk* or *Vaikhari* (uttered vocally/with sound), *Avyakta* as *Upāngsu* (uttered with inaudible voice) and *Mānas* (mental).

Vaikhari Japa

The word *Vaikhari* has been explained in different ways by various authors. According to *Padmapādācārya* (one of the main four disciples of *Shankarācārya*, the exponent of non-dualistic monism) *Vi* means specially and *Khar* means harshness or hardness and that is why vocally uttered words are called *Vaikhari*. *Bhāskarroy* in his *Soubhāgyabhāskar* commentary on *Lalitā Sahasranām* (thousand names of Goddess *Lalitā Mahā Tripurāsundari*) opined that because words are uttered vocally with the help a *Prānvāyu* (vital air of respirations) called *Khar* it is named as *Vaikhari*. In *Soubhāgyasudhoday*, another commentary on *Lalitā Sahasranām* it is said that *Vai* (certainly), *Kha* (ear channel) and *Ra/ Rāti* (traverses/ goes) make the word *Vaikhari* which means that sound of word is heard because it certainly goes through the ear channel. Repeated utterance of the name of God or Mantra so that others can hear also is called *Vaikhari Japa*.

Upāngshu Japa

Being mentally engrossed in thinking of God and with little movements of tongue and lips repeated utterance of a name or Mantra inaudible to others is called *Upāngshu Japa*. According to *Vrihat Tantrasār* (a core book on *Tantra*) *Upāngshu Japa* may only be audible to the person doing it.

Mānas Japa

Repeated mental recitation of a name or Mantra along with contemplation on the meaning inherent in it is called *Mānas Japa*. In *Mānas Japa* there is complete absence of any physical organic movements and audible sound. In this *Japa* there is total union of the mind, Mantra and the Godhead representing the Mantra.

Japa is also classified as (1) *Nitya* (daily or routine), (2) *Naimittik* (special occasion or purpose) and (3) *Kāmya* (with worldly desires).

Nitya Japa

An aspirant is supposed to perform routine *Japa* practice daily. It is ordained in the scripture that after proper initiation from Guru it is obligatory to do *Sandhyā Upāsanā* three times a day along with *Japa* of the Mantra of initiation. *Sandhyā* is derived from the word *Sandhi* which means time-junction and *Upāsanā* (*Upā*=near; *āsan*=seat; i.e. to sit near God or to be in company of God) is the other name of prayer or worship. The junctions between night and day (dawns), between forenoon and afternoon (midday) and between day and night (dusk) are prescribed for *Sandhyā Upāsanā*. In some cases midnight (*Mahānishā*) *Sandhyā* is also prescribed.

Naimittik Japa

Besides routine practice *Japa* performed in special occasions, auspicious times and days (such as during Solar and Lunar eclipses, full-Moon, new-Moon, the Sun's passage to the next sign at the equinoxes etc.) are called *Naimittik Japa*.

Kāmya Japa

Kāmya is derived from the word *Kām* (lust/desire/expectation). In addition to routine ones *Japa* performed with a resolve for attainment of worldly expectations is called *Kāmya Japa*.

Q. What is *Ajapā Japa*?

A. The definition of *Ajapā japa* is quite different from that of usual *Japa*. Before going into scriptural technicalities let us consider the simple phenomenon of propagation of sound in terms of science of Physics. Sound propagates in wave patterns following the Simple Harmonic Motion with air as the medium. The waves created in the air reach the eardrum which in turn sends signals to the audio centers in the brain and sounds are perceived. It can be said that any displacement of air carries sound waves. During inhalation and exhalation there are displacements of air. The movements of air during inhalation and exhalation carry the sound *Ham* and *Sah* respectively. The Mantra *Hamsah* is being repeated automatically along with each respiration. This is called *Ajapā Japa*. It is an effortless and involuntary continuous process for the lifetime of a person. A *Jiva* (sentient being) recites *Hamsah Mantra* 21600 times a day (15 respiration/minute X 60 minutes X 24 hours/day = 21600). *Ajapā* is of two types *Vyakta* i.e. manifested and *Gupta* i.e. unmanifested/hidden. *Vyakta* again manifests in two forms as Sound and Light. *Gupta Ajapā* is the reverse of *Hamsah* i.e. *Saha* or the union of Shiva and *Shakti* (Shiva's energy). In the scriptures on *Swaroday* (science of *Swar*= respiration/ vital energy of life processes) it is said, “*Hangkārang Shivarupena Sakārah Shaktirućyate*” (*Hangkārang*=sound *Ham*; *Shivarupena*=form of Shiva; *Sakārah*=sound *Sah*; *Shakti*=energy; *ućyate*=being said). In *Surendra Samhitā* it is said that “*Hnagsātmikāng Bhagavati Jivo Japati Sarvadā.*” (*Hangsātmikang*=*Hangsah* as the self; *Bhagavati*=the female presiding deity; *Jiva*=sentient being; *Japati*= is reciting; *Sarvadā*=all the time) i.e. *Jiva* always is reciting the Mantra *Hangsah* which is the supreme Goddess herself. Others equate it with *Kundalini* the creative power of Shiva that lies coiled up in three and a half

fold in the lowest plexus called *Mulādhāra-Āakra* at the base of Vertebral Column.

In general, an aspirant is not aware of such a continuous process that is going on within. As the mind is not directly or consciously linked with such a process it can not be activated, and the fruit remains unobtainable. An aspirant can get the knowledge and the ways to do it only from an able teacher or Guru. Bookish knowledge about this is of no use practically.

Q. What are the fundamental differences between Japa and Dhyana?

A. In the words of Ma, ***“Jap karte kartei dhyana hoi”*** i.e. the state of *dhyana* occurs automatically during japa practice. In other words it can be said that Japa is the practice and the result is *Dhyana*.

Q. What is a Mantra?

A. Before going directly into the definition of Mantra let us consider a few preliminaries about the word. According to Indian spiritual beliefs The Veda is divided in four parts as *Rik, Sām, Yaju* and *Atharva* by the great seer and saint *Vyāsadeva* and taught these to his four main disciples. He taught *Rigved* to *Pail*, *Yajurved* to *Vaishampāyan*, *Sāmved* to *Jaimini* and *Atharvaved* to *Sumanta*. Each Veda again is divided into two sections Mantra and Brahman. ***“Mantra brāhmanayor vedanāmadheyam.”*** i.e. Mantra and Brāhman together is called The Veda. *Samhitā* is the other name of the Mantra part. *Sam* means together and *Hit* means placed or compiled. The part which deals with the undisclosed meanings and applications of *Samhitā* or Mantra is called *Brāhman*.

A simple definition of Mantra is the sacred word or formula to be chanted as spiritual practice.

Yāska the author of *Nirukta* (Special Vedic etymology) defined Mantra as “*Mantra mananāt*” i.e. with which contemplation can be done is called Mantra. This is the oldest available definition of Mantra.

The word Mantra is the combination of two parts *Man* and *Tra*. *Man* is derived from the root verb *man* means to ponder over, to ruminate mentally and *Tra* from the root verb *tra* means to protect or to liberate. “*Mananāt trāyate*” (*mananāt*= on pondering over, *trāyate*=to liberate) that which liberates on pondering over or on ruminating mentally is called Mantra. *Gāyatri Tantra* in its detail definition said, “By contemplation of which a human being protects himself from sins, enjoys heavenly pleasures, gets liberated and achieves the four chief objects of human pursuit viz. virtue or piety, wealth or riches, sensual enjoyments and final beatitude is called Mantra.

Mantra is the sacred word or formula by which the nature of the Supreme reality is reflected on as identical with the self. It is called Mantra because it induces *manana* or reflection on the Supreme self and because it provides *trāna* or protection from the whirling of transmigratory life.

Section II, Sutra 1 of *Shiva Sutra* (Aphorisms on *Kāshmir Shaivism*) the core book on non-dualistic Shiva philosophy of Kashmir is “*Ācitta mantrah*.” Here *citta* means that which ponders over the highest Reality. In other words, it is the consciousness that ponders over mantras which constitute the essential characteristic of the perfect I-consciousness. *Ācitta* is equated with Mantra. In *Vāmakeshwar Tantra* it is said, “The intelligence principle is evolved out of non-manifested sound-form of the Ultimate Reality or *Sabda-Brahma*. *Mana* (mind), *Buddhi* (intelligence), *Ācitta* (consciousness) and *Ahangkār* (I-ness) are evolved from that principle” Naturally Jiva-intelligence also is Mantra. *Ksemarāja* the great commentator on *Kāshmir Shaivism* in his *Vimarsini* commentary on Shiva Sutra wrote, “The mind of the *Sādhaka* (Aspirant) focused on intensive alertness of the Godhead implied in a Mantra identifies with that Godhead and consequently becomes Mantra itself. (At that point of time) The state of mind itself which is Mantra, not the mere conglomeration of various letters of the alphabet.” In *Srikān̄thi-Samhita*, it has been said, “*Prithangmantra prithangmantri na siddhayati kadācāna*” i.e. if the practiser is different from the Mantra, then this Mantra will never give results. *Spanda Kārikā* (one of the core books on *Kāshmir Shaivism*) says, “*Sādhakena cittaena tenaiva Shivadharmina*” i.e. the mind of the practiser along with the mantra has characteristics of Shiva.

From the above discussions it can be said that Mantra is consciousness itself. Sounds or words are the body of Mantra.

Q. If sound and word are inert objects then how can Mantra be conscious?

A. A bodied sentient being is conscious, even when the body is inert. Likewise Mantra is not inert in spite of its body (sound or word) being inert.

Q. It seems that consciousness is the other name of Mantra and Jiva is a conscious being. Should we take a Jiva as representation of all Mantras’?

A. All the mantras have their origin as the *Kundalini* (the latent serpent-power/consciousness/ supreme reality) in the body of a sentient being. If *Jiva* is Shiva in principle and Mantra is *Shivadharmina* (Characteristics of Shiva) so it can well be inferred that all the Mantras have their existence in dormancy in the body of a *Jiva*. With an appropriate way of spiritual practice the meaning of Mantra shines in the mind of the practiser. It has to be remembered that here non-individualistic all pervading consciousness is taken into consideration.

Q. What is the relation between a deity and Mantra?

A. In *Shaktisangam Tantra* it is said, “*Mantrarupo bhaveddeva*”(rupa = form, *mantrarupo* means form of mantra *bhaved*=becomes; *deva*=deity) deity becomes the form of Mantra. *Gandharva Tantra* said, “*sarveshāmeva devānām mantramādyam sharirakam*” (*sarveshām*=of all, *eva*=verily, *devānām*=deities, *ādyam*=primarily, *sharirakam*=body) verily Mantra is the primary body or form of all deities. A deity is represented by three bodies, gross, subtle and subtlest or causal.

Gross body is of name and form (*nāma* and *rupa*=image/statue) called *Vigraha*. Subtle body is the symbolic or geometrical representation of the deity called *Yantra*. And the subtlest or the causal body is represented by word or sound called *Mantra*. The relation between *Mantra* and deity is the same as between expression and expressed.

Q. Why a Mantra is called Shabda-Brahma?

A. *Shabda-Brahma* means the Qualified Ultimate Reality in the form of sound. Now let us consider the origin of sound.

The Ultimate Reality or the Eternal Shiva (*sanātan Shiva*) has two forms: - non-qualified and qualified. The former is independent of Nature (*Prakriti*) or *Shakti* (energy) whereas the later is coupled with *Shakti* eager to be manifested as creation. It has to be remembered that, in fact, at no point in time is Shiva without *Shakti*. But at times as *Shakti* remains one with Shiva with no signs of expression it seems that Shiva is without *Shakti*. The Qualified Shiva always has Self-awareness or independent divine Will which is a subtle activity or spiritual dynamism. This dynamism is yet to have any expression like physical, psychological or *Prānic* (vital force of life) activities.

During *Mahāpralaya* (Cosmic night or dissolution of creation) this divine Will remains concealed within the great Lord himself like the memories of a person in deep sleep. He was the *Sat-* principle (Existence) only. The Veda said, “*Ātmā vā idameka evāgra āsit. Nānyat kinćan mishat. Sa ikshata lokānnu srijā iti*” [*Aitareya Upanishad* 1.1.] that means (*Ātmā eva*=only *Ātmā* (the ultimate reality), *evāgra*=in the beginning (of creation), *idam*= the creation, *eka*=one, *āsit*=existed) in the beginning of creation the Ultimate reality alone existed. (*Nā*=no, *anyat*=others, *kinćan*=some, *mishat*= activity like blinking of eyes) i.e. no other things like blinking of eyes were there. That means the total absence of creation. (*SA*=He, *ikshata*= saw/ considered/introspect/willed, *lokān nu*=divisions of the universe according to the fruits of actions of sentient beings, *srijai*= I shall create.) He willed to create the divisions of the universe according to the fruits of actions of sentient beings. The desire for vision, again of the world lost or dissolved during cosmic night, is associated with a sense of void which is *Māyā*, of which the Lord himself is the controller. The vision of void is accompanied by an indistinct sound called *parā-nāda* which fills the void. *Nāda* is of nature of light. The first self-expression of the supreme Will is the origination of void and the indistinct sound

and diffused light filling this void. Next there is concentration of this light and sound into a focus called *parā-Bindu*. Here the power of action starts unfolding itself distinctly. *Para-Bindu* now breaks into three parts as *bindu*, *bija* and *nāda* or the great-sound. Here we have two sets of *nada* and *Bindu*. The first one being causal and the second is the manifestation. The *nāda* which comes into being at the split of *parā-Bindu* is known as *Sabda-brahma*. All the sounds have their origin in that *nada* or *Sabda-brahma*. Naturally a Mantra can be called as *Sabda-brahma*.

Q. If all sounds originate from Nāda then why are all sounds not treated as a Mantra?

A. Sound is of two forms, with meaning and without meaning. The former is represented by alphabets. Mantra is a conglomeration of alphabets or word/words with meanings, which are to be pondered over.

Q. A Mantra is the body of a deity and the sound or word/words represented by letters of alphabets are the body of a Mantra. Unless these are divine a Mantra will lose its divinity. How can one put divinity in the letters of the alphabet?

A. One need not put any extra divinity into the letters of the alphabet (*Varna*) because these are divine by themselves. It is said in *Tantrasadbhāva* (a Tantra scripture) that all Mantras are composed of letters of the alphabet and all letters of the alphabet are the representations of *Shakti* (energy) called *Mātrikā*. As this *Mātrikā* remains dormant as one with Shiva before manifestations of creation, it also has the Shiva principle. At the onset of creation it pervades the entire space. In Sanskrit fifty alphabet letters uttered or written are the gross representations of this all pervading energy. *Mātrikā* means one who produces. The energy, which is the causative factor of all gross and subtle creations, is *Mātrikā*. Letters are of two classes, *Swaravarna* (16 vowels) and *Byanjanvarna* (36 consonants). The former represents Shiva-*Shakti* couple. (According to *Varnoddhār Tantra*, (a Tantra treaty on letters of alphabets) a consonant always needs a vowel to be expressed as *Dhwani* (sound) and also represents Shiva-*Shakti* couple. It is interesting to note that the letters are classified in terms of gender.

Q. What is the relation between sound (Dhwani) and letter (Varna)?

A. There is a very close relationship between the two. A *Dhwani* is a sound without a letter. A Letter can not be represented without sound. To put a meaning to the sound letter is a necessity. Sounds when produced are expressed in different notes and scales independently. It is to be noted that each letter has its presiding deity.

Q. Words are composed of letters. If each letter has a separate deity then a word is supposed to represent more than one deity and likewise a Mantra comprising of one or more words should also represent more than one deity. In that case how can a Mantra be deity- specific?

A. *Shāradā Tilak* (a well known text on Tantra) says, “*Sarvadevamayi Devi sarvamantramayi Shiva.*” (*Sarva*=all, *devamayi*=form of god, *Devi*=Supreme goddess, *mantramayi*=form of Mantra, *Shiva*= consort of lord Shiva or the presiding deity of the universe.) That means the Supreme goddess represents all gods and all Mantras are the forms of the Supreme goddess. The above text also says that the Supreme goddess is the other name of *Kundalini*. Naturally all Mantras are the different forms of the Ultimate Reality expressed as sound energy or *Shabda-Brahma*.

Suppose two bunches of candles, each bunch composed of ten assorted candles, are kindled in a dark room. Light from individual candle in both bunches contributes to the total illumination. Each candle and each bunch has a different intensity of light but in respect of total illumination neither one can perceive the individual contribution of a candle nor of a bunch. Apparently though a Mantra seems deity-specific but in principle it represents the Ultimate Reality.

Q. Should one take all sounds and words as Mantras?

A. According to Tantra philosophy all letters of alphabets, words and sounds are Mantras because, all these are the different forms of the *Shabda-Brahma*. The *Gandharva Tantra* says, “*Ācāitanyam sarvabhutānām shabdabrahma swarupakam/ Varnarupen tad vyaktam mantravidyādi bhedata*”. (*Ācāitanyam*=supreme consciousness, *sarva*=all, *bhutānām*=creation, *sabda-brahma*=ultimate reality in the form of sound, *swarupakam*=form of, *varna*=letter, *rupen*=as a form, *tad*=it, *vyaktam*=manifested, *mantra*=Mantra, *vidyā*=conglomeration of mantras depicting a deity in particular, *adi*=etc., *bhedata*=differentiations) That means the Supreme consciousness pervading all the creations is the *Shabda-brahma*. Its manifestations differ because of differences in expressions as letters and forms of deities. It can be said that the energy in the form of Mantra expresses itself with the help of letters, words and sentences. Mantra can be expressed as any sound irrespective of languages provided a particular meaning is imparted in it during applications in worships, rituals and *Japa*. Of course, all sound are Mantras in principle.

Q. Are Mantras the products of human intelligence?

A. If a Mantra is the representation of God how can that be the product of human intelligence? A Mantra is of divine origin and is only perceived or received in the intelligence which was purified by penance, austerities and intensive spiritual practices, of a seer. That is why sages are called as *Rishah Mantra-drashtārah* (*Drashtā*=seer or perceiver of Mantra) not *Mantra-srashtā* (*Srashtā*=creator).

Q. What are the common factors between Veda-Mantra and other Mantra?

A. Like Veda-Mantras all other Mantras also are associated with four factors as *Rishi*, *Āchanda*, *Devatā* and *Viniyoga*.

Rishi:- He is the person who by penance, austerities and spiritual practices has purified both his inner and outer-being so that the divinity in the form of a Mantra

with its full glory and meaning, descended on his heart. The name of the first seer or perceiver of the particular Mantra always remains associated it.

Āhanda:- Each Mantra has its particular metrical composition. That means dissention of the divine in the form of Mantra follows the rhythm of poetical meter. In the Vedas there are mentions of seven poetical meters viz. *Gāyatri*, *Tristup*, *Jagati*, *Anustup*, *Ushnik*, *Pankti* and *Vrihati*. It is a common experience that any orderly reception in the mind has its sustaining impression and effect, which is not easily erasable. Literal meaning of the word *Āhanda* in Sanskrit is that which covers or veils. *Nirukta* (etymology of Vedic words) says, “*Āhandaṅsi āhandaṅā*” (*āhandaṅsi*=the *āhanda*s or meters, *āhandaṅā*=for covering) that means *āhanda*s or meters are for covering. In *Shāradā Tilak* it is said, “In olden time the gods scared of death (from the demons) invoked *āhanda*s to cover themselves.”

Devatā:- Each Mantra has its particular presiding deity. It has been discussed before that a Mantra is the body of the deity. There can be no Mantra without a Deity and *vice versa*.

Viniyoga:- A Mantra serves multiple purposes of an aspirant. An aspirant engages himself in spiritual endeavors with the view to fulfillment of one or all the following human goals, *Dharma* (inspirations to tread the path to the ultimate objective of life), *Artha* (riches or effluence in life), *Kāma* (desires related to sensual and other worldly enjoyments) and *Moksha* (the ultimate beatitude). *Viniyoga* means the adoption of a Mantra for particular purpose in a particular spiritual rite or practice. (*Vi*= special/particular, *niyoga*= adoption).

Q. Unlike Veda-mantra what are the other essential limbs of a Mantra?

A. In the scriptures on Tantra there are references of other essential limbs of a Mantra. These are *Rishi*, *Āhanda*, *Devatā* (deity related to the Mantra), *Bij* (seed of Mantra), *Shakti* (power or energy of Mantra), and *Kilak* (peg/pin or a bolt. Here *Kilak* means any hindrance that blocks the efficacy of a mantra). In *Dipika* commentary of *Shrividyaṅratnasutram* (a core book on *Shri-Yantra*) there is mention of seven limbs of a Mantra, viz. *Rishi*, *Āhanda*, *Bij*, *Kilak*, *Shakti*, *Anganyās* (*Anga*=limbs of body, *nyās*=placement. *Anganyās* means the placement of a Mantra or its divisions in different limbs/parts of the body of the aspirant or the statue of a deity) and *Dhyāna* (mental reflection on the meaning of the Mantra).

Gāyatri Tantra mentions of five limbs of a mantra as *Āvāhan* (invocation of the presiding deity of the Mantra in the statue/ *Yantra*/ mind) *Dhyān*, *Smaran* (remembrance), *Samarpan* (surrendering the results of the application of the Mantra to the deity) and *Visarjan* (immersion of the deity within the self of the aspirant).

Q. Are there any categorical divisions of Mantra?

A. Mantras are broadly categorized as *Vedic-Mantra*, *Purānic-Mantra* and *Tāntric-Mantra*.

Vedic-mantra: - Mantras contained in the Vedas are called Vedic-Mantras.

Purānic-Mantra: - *Purānas* are the scriptural texts written in verses (*Shlokas*) elucidating the intricate religious mysteries and philosophies with examples and anecdotes. All the *Shlokas* in the *Purānas* are thought to be of divine origin and esteemed as Mantras.

Tāntric-Mantra: - Although *Vedic* and *Purānic* Mantras also have their place in *Tāntric* literature, there are some Mantras found exclusively with reference to Tantra.

Since all the religious traditions and philosophies have their origin in the Vedas, these classifications are somewhat tentative.

In Tantra traditions Mantras are categorized in different ways. Mantras are classified as male, female and eunuch like in the case of *Varnas* (letters of the alphabet). According to *Rāghavabhatta* (a great commentator on Tantra) this classification is based on the considerations of application and efficacy of the Mantras. In fact, a Mantra being the representation of the Ultimate Reality cannot have any gender differentiation. A Mantra for a male deity is called *Pung-Mantra* (*pung*=male), for a female deity called *String-Mantra* (*string*=female) and all other Mantras are called *Napungsak-Mantra* (*napungsak*=eunuch). *Vidyā* is the other name of female Mantra. According to *Meru Tantra* a Female Mantra brings in enjoyments, a male Mantra results in liberation.

In *Shāradā Tilak* (a treaty on Tantra) Mantras are categorized as *Soumya* and *Soura*. *Soumya* is derived from the word *Som* means the Moon and *Soura* from *Surya* means the Sun. *Soura-Mantra* is also called *Āgneya-Mantra* (*Āgni*=fire).

In *Varāha Samhitā* we find a different classification. Mantras are classified as *Siddha*, *Sādhyā*, *Susiddha* and *Ari*. *Siddha Mantra* comes to fruition by Japa, *Sādhyā* by fire oblation, *Susiddha* effective immediately after reception from a Guru or divine source and *Ari* brings in disasters.

During initiation (*Dikshā*) Mantras are classified as *Rini* (debtor) and *Dhani* (creditor). This classification is of elaborate details. However, in simple it can be said that if the number of letters in the name of the recipient exceeds the number of letters in the Mantra it is called *Rini-Mantra* and in the reverse case it is called *Dhani-Mantra*. *Rini-Mantra* is considered to be auspicious and should be accepted and if the Mantra falls in the *Dhani* category it should be discarded.

Another classification is based on the number of letters contained in a Mantra. Mono-syllable Mantra is named as *Pinda*, bi-syllable Mantra is *Kartari*, Mantra with three to nine syllables is called *Bijak*, Mantra with ten to twenty syllables is called *Mantrak* and if the number of letters exceeds twenty it is called *Mālā-Mantra*.

Q. What is a Bij-Mantra?

A. In fact, any letter of alphabets conjoined with a note of *nada* is a Mantra. We have discussed earlier that *Mātrikās* are Mantras.

Literal meaning of the word *Bij* is seed. Banyan tree is manifested in its full forms as an effect from the tiniest seed as the cause; likewise a Mantra and the deity related to it are manifested (the effect) from the *Bij-Mantra* (the cause). A cultivator first has to sow the seeds in the field, nurtures the growth of plants and finally reaps the crops. In the similar way, an initiate after receiving a *Bij-mantra* of his beloved Godhead should put all his efforts into practice so that the deity in his full glory appears before him. Everything in the creation is of name and form and a projection of *Kundalini*. (The creative power of the Ultimate Reality) A name is expressed in sound-form. And this sound is the inherent criterion of an object. The specific energy of *Kundalini* is the causative factor for the formation of

a particular object. The vibrations of that specific energy are the inherent sound form of the object which is its subtle manifestation called the *Bij* or seed of the object. For example, the vibration of the specific energy of *Kundalini*, which is the causative factor for the creation of water, is expressed in its sound form or *Bij* is “*Bam*”. Each deity had its *Bij-Mantra* and the subtle power of the deity remains latent in it. *Klim* for *Krishna*, *Krim* for goddess *Kāli*, *Aim* for goddess *Saraswati*, *Houm* for lord Shiva and *Shrim* for goddess *Laxmi* and so on etc. Apparently it seems like a mono-syllable sound. With proper spiritual exercise when this latent power is awakened the divine force pertaining to the specific Godhead starts working. Shri Ma Anandamayee said, “From whoever you get the *Bij-Mantra*, keeping it as a secret in your mind work on it then definitely in time from that seed the tree will grow, bloom and bear fruits. Keep on watering in secrecy. At the proper time the tree will germinate.” In the *Yāmāl* (a group of texts on Tantra) it is said, “Verily from the *Bij-Mantras* issue forth the bodies of the deities. An aspirant by doing Japa of the *Bij-Mantra* related to the specific deity will be one with *Brahma* or the Ultimate Reality.

Q. Sometimes it appears that there are exceptions regarding specificity of a Bij-Mantra for a deity. Please explain.

A. It is true that certain *Bij-Mantras* are related to more than one deity. For instance, *Klim* (called as *Kāma-Bij*) related to god *Krishna* or *Gopāl* is also applied to goddess *Guhya-Kāli* (an incarnation of goddess *Kāli*) and *Aim* (called as *Vāgbhava-Bij*) the *Saraswati-Bij* is also applied to the Guru. In linguistics we find that a basic word can have different meanings. Particular context or the way the word is used determines its meaning. The same argument also applies in case of above exceptions regarding *Bij-mantra*.

For example, in the Mantra “*Klim Krishnāya Namah*” *Klim-Bij* stands for *Krishna*. The same *Bij-Mantra* is also used in case of goddess *Tripurāsundari*. With the change of context the meaning of a *Bij-Mantra* is changed. A *Krishna* worshiper when he gets this *Bij_Mantra* during initiation, to him it stands for *Krishna* only. For another aspirant it may mean goddess *Tripurāsundari*.

Q. Can there be more than one Bij-Mantra or Mantra for a particular deity?

A. A single deity can have more than one Mantra and *Bij-Mantra*. In general Mantras differ with respect to number of letters or syllables. But it is not uncommon that different Mantras for one deity may have the same number of letters or syllables. For instance, both the Mantras “*Klim Hrishikeshāya Namah*” and *Shrim Hrim Klim Krishnāya Swāhā*” having the same number of syllables (eight Sanskrit syllable in each) but different *Bij-Mantras*, stand for Krishna. This may be due to difference in the eligibility, aim and school which the aspirant belongs to.

Q. Can a Mantra of a deity be without Bij-Mantra?

A. There are Mantras without *Bij-Mantras*. For instance, “*bada bada vāgbādinī swāhā*” is called *Vāgishwari-Mantra* which has no *Bij-Mantra*. When the *Bij* “*Hrim*” is put in the beginning and end it becomes *Mahāsaraswat-Mantra*. Some *Dāmar-Mantras* (*Dāmar* is a group of text on Tantra) which are composed of colloquial words and do not contain a *Bij-Mantra*.

Q. Is there any Mantra composed of Bij-Mantras only?

A. Only *Bij* can also make a Mantra. The Mantra “*Shrim Hrim Hum*” containing only three *Bij-Mantras* stands for goddess *Mahākālī*.

Q. Is Aum a Bij-Mantra?

A. It has been discussed before that all sounds originated from *Shabda-Brahma*. *Aum/Om* or *Pranava* is its sonic manifestation. In the Yoga-Sutra of *Patanjali* it is said that “*Tasya vācaka Pranava*”. (*Tasya*=of that, means the Ultimate Reality; *Vācaka*=expression (its manifestation); *Pranava*= *Aum/Om*). This is called as *Mahā-Bij* (*Mahā*=great; *Bji*=seed). All the *Bij-Mantras* are the derivatives of *Mātrikās* and *Pranava* is the source of all *Mātrikās*. *Aum/Om* is also termed as *Brahma-Bij*. Deities are the specific representations of different forms of qualified Brahma or the Ultimate Reality.

In the Vedas no other *Bij-Mantras* were used except *Aum/Om*. All *Bij-Mantras* are found in the texts on Tantra only.

Q. Where and how is Om/Aum being used in Tantra?

A. *Pranava* is called as “*Mantrādya*” (*ādya*=*ādi*=starting or beginning) i.e. all Mantras start with *Pranava*. According to Bhāskarroy *Mantrādya* means that which should be uttered at the beginning of Mantra. The Vedic quotation “*Omkārena sarvā vāk santrinnā*” (*Omkāren*= by the sound Om, *sarvā*=all, *vāk*=Mantra, *santrinnā*=bracketed) means all Mantras are bracketed by Om. In other words it can be said that Om should be put both at the beginning and at the end of all Mantras. Although Om is purely a Vedic *Bij-Mantra* there are many *Tāntric-Mantras* which start with this.

Q. What is Tāntric Pranava?

A. In *Mahānirvān Tantra*(a text on Tantra) it is said, “*Kalou tuMāyādyai sarva karmāni kuryu Shankarashāsanāt*” (*kalou*=in *Kali Yuga*=Iron Age, *tu*=verily, *Māyā*= *Māyā-Bij* i.e.the *Bij Hrim*, *ādya*= at the start, *sarva*=all, *karmāni*=spiritual rites, *kuryu*=should be performed, *Shankara*=lord Shiva, *Shāsanāt*=by order or ordain) that means all Mantras should start with the *Māyā-Bij Hrim*. This is also called *Tāntric- Pranava*.

Q. Are there any utilities of Vedic Mantras in the practice of Tantra?

A. It has been observed that in some routine and special spiritual practices in *Sanātan Dharma* (*Sanātan*=eternal, *Dharma*=religion) i.e. Traditional Indian religious practices, both Vedic and Tantric ways are adopted. But there are purely Tāntric practices where Vedic Mantras are also used but not the reverse.

Q. What are the fields of application of Mantras?

A. There are innumerable applications for Mantras. To name a few: - (1) For conditional liberation, (2) Worship of God and various other incarnations, (3) Achievement of Super-natural powers, (4) To pay homage to forefathers, (5) To take control of the power of spirits, (6) To achieve and take control of the Power of gods and demi-gods, (7) To drive away the power of evil spirits, (8) Performance of solemn rites for propitiating the planets and deities to secure prosperity or to avert evil effects. (9) Cure of diseases, (10) To bring harm to human, cattle and crops, (11) Relieving from effects of poisons, (12) To influence thoughts and activities of others, (13) Purification of the body by doing special rites. (14) Ultimate Liberation by way of *Ātma-Shuddhi* (purification of the inner being) which is the primary requirement of all spiritual endeavors as the first step. A Mantra brings about inner purification that is why it is considered as sacred.

Q What is the relation between Puja and Japa?

A. *Shaktisangam Tantra* says, “*Pujāyuktam japet Mantra na Mantra kevalam japet*”. (*Pujāyuktam*=along with Puja, *japet*=Japa should be performed, *na*=no, *kevalam*=only) That means Japa should always be performed along with Pujā not alone. Of course, Japa without Pujā is not futile but considered to be less efficacious. It may be considered as *Nāma-Japa*.

Q. It has been said that one should contemplate the meaning of the Mantra (Mantrārtha) during Japa. What is the way to know it?

A. A practiser should contemplate the meaning of a Mantra along with Japa. Besides the literal meaning each Mantra has its mystical meaning which has to be understood from the lips of Guru as advised in *Purashćaran Tantra*. (“*Mantrārtha gurumukhād bodhya*” i.e. *Mantrārtha*= meaning of Mantra, *gurumukhād*=from the mouth of Guru, *bodhya*=to be understood) It is worth mentioning that a practiser should also know about Mantra-Ćaitanya (Consciousness of Mantra) and *Yoni-Mudrā* along with the meaning of the Mantra while using it in spiritual practice.

Q. What is Mantra-Ćaitanya (Mantra-consciousness)?

A. The origin of all Mantras is the all pervading divine consciousness. It is the same that exists in Mantra, deity, Guru and aspirant. But in the aspirant and Mantra it remains as latent or dormant. A realized Guru by his awakened consciousness empowers the Mantra and passes it on to the disciple during *Dikshā* (initiation).

Mantra (dormant) = Deity = Guru = self = Mantra (conscious). Without induction of potency in a Mantra it is only a conglomeration of letters.

Q. Can an aspirant empower a Mantra by himself?

A. For this there are different methods described in Tantra texts such as (1) to contemplate on the Mantra to be in the solar orb or disc and repeat it 108 times. Presence of Eternal Shiva and his Eternal Shakti (energy/power) should be thought of in the solar disc, (2) to recite the Mantra by putting the *Im-Bij* at the beginning and end of it. It should be mentioned here that the secret or mystical significance of all these processes should be heard from the lips of the Guru, not from books.

Q. What is Yoni-Mudrā?

A. It is technical term having different meanings in relation to its different applications in spiritual practices. As such it is a kind of Yoga practice detailed descriptions of which are found in the texts of *Hatha-Yoga* or *Rāja-Yoga*. So far its application to empower a Mantra is concerned an aspirant should learn its secret meaning from the Guru. In *Prāntoshini Tantra* (compilations on Tantra texts) it is said that an aspirant should think of the letters of the Mantra embedded like a garland in the space of consciousness which is saturated with *Eternal- nectar*.

Some say that an aspirant should think of his individual consciousness as identical with the all pervading consciousness or *Kundalini* which in its upward movement from the *Mulādhār-Ākra* (lowest plexus at the base of vertebral column), by penetrating other *Ākras* gets united with Ultimate Shiva. And this union results in the appearance of Eternal Nectar which has the effulgence of ten millions Suns and soothing like ten millions Moons.

In another place it is said that contemplation on “*Soham*” (I am That) is the best of *Yoni-Mudrās*’.

Q. Is it necessary to have Dikshā (initiation) for doing any spiritual practice with Mantra?

A. Before answering the question let us try to understand in brief something about *Dikshā*. In all Indian spiritual traditions from the Vedic period a Guru/preceptor/teacher/mentor plays the pivotal role. Moved by inner urge to know and understand the secrets of creation and life an inquisitive aspirant should approach a wise Guru with reverence and submission. The Guru in turn after assessing the capability of the aspirant first initiates him so that he becomes eligible to tread the specific and suitable path of practice to reach his goal. Propagation of life follows parents’-progeny lineage whereas propagation of wisdom and knowledge follows Guru-disciple lineage.

In all the texts on Tantra *Dikshā* is considered to be the first step in spiritual endeavors. So it can well be said that *Dikshā* is a must for taking up any spiritual practice.

Q. What are the various types of Dikshā?

A. Broadly there are two types of *Dikshā*, (1) *Vedic Dikshā* and (2) *Tāntric Dikshā*.

Vedic Dikshā: Initiation of first three of the four social caste orders {*Brāhmin*=priest class, *Kshatriya*=ruler class, *Vaisya*= trader and agriculturist class and *Shudra*=servile class} in Vedic *Gāyatri Mantra* is called *Vedic Dikshā*. This is obligatory for these three castes. These three castes are called *Dwija* (twice born). *Dikshā* is the second birth for these three castes. Besides, before performing any special Vedic sacrificial rites such as fire oblations a *Yajaman* (worshipper through priest) needed to be initiated.

Tāntric Dikshā: A *Dwija* after taking *Vedic Dikshā* of the *Gāyatri-Mantra* should be initiated in *Ishta-Mantra* (*Ishta*=most beloved image of deity to an aspirant) in the Tāntric way. *Tāntric Dikshā* is commonly prescribed for all castes. In *Vishwasār Tantra* four types of *Dikshās* are mentioned.

1. *Kriyāvati Dikshā*: This is ritual intensive. Here purification of the body (gross, subtle and causal) of the disciple, induction of Guru's consciousness in the disciple and washing of the disciple with consecrated water are done by the Guru. This type is widely practiced.
2. *Kalāvati Diksha*: Here a Guru meditates on different *Kalās* as ordained in the scripture in different parts of the body of the disciple in ascending order from feet to crown and places the *Kalās* in respective parts of the body in descending order from crown to feet.
3. *Varnamayii Dikshā*: Here a Guru places the letters of the mantra in different parts of the body of the disciple as ordained in the scriptures. He then merges the letters and the consciousness of the disciple in the all pervading consciousness in ascending order and again takes the letters and the consciousness out and places them in the respective parts of the body of the

disciple in descending order. By this method of *Dikshā* the disciple feels divine bliss in him.

4. *Bedhamayii Dikshā*: This is also called *Mānas Dikshā* (mental initiation). Here a Guru initiates his disciple through meditation. It is very rare to find such a Guru capable of giving such *Dikshā*. Of course an eligible disciple is the rarest to find.

In *Kulārṇava Tantra* seven types of *Dikshās* are named such as 1. *Kriyā Dikshā*, 2. *Kalā Dikshā*, 3. *Varna Dikshā*, 4. *Mānas Dikshā* (mental *Dikshā*) 5. *Vāk Dikshā* (*Dikshā* by speech), 6. *Drik Dikshā* (*Diksha* by look), and 7. *Sparsha Dikshā* (*Dikshā* by touch). *Kriyā Dikshās* are classified into eight and *Varna Dikshās* are classified into three categories. First four types are the same as *Kriyāvatiī*, *Kalāvatiī*, *Varnamayii* and *Bedhamayii Dikshās* respectively.

In *Rudra Yāmala* (Yāmals are a group of Texts on Tantra) we find three types of *Dikshā viz. Ānavi, Shāktii* and *Shāmbhavii*.

1. *Ānavii Dikshā*: The ceremony initiation which is performed with Mantra, Worship of deities, *Nyāsa* (placement of Mantra in different parts of body is called *Nyāsa*), *Asana* (a particular posture of the body), *Dhyāna* (here *dhyāna* means meditation), and other paraphernalia is *Ānavi Dikshā*. This again are of different types viz. I. *Smārtii* (derived from the word *Smāran*=remembrance) here guru initiates from a faraway place in the physical absence of the disciple, II. *Mānasikii* (*mānas*=mental) here Guru looks at the disciple sitting nearby and initiates him mentally, III. *Yogii* (derived from the word *Yoga*) here guru enters into the body of disciple by a Yogic method and conjoins his self with the self of disciple, IV. *Ākshush* (*ākshu*= eye) here guru thinks himself as “I am the ultimate lord Shiva” and looks at the disciple compassionately, V. *Sparshinii* (*sparsha*= touch) here Guru touches the disciple compassionately, VI. *Vācīkii* (*vāk*=word) here Guru identifies his mouth with that of his Guru and gives the divine Mantra to the disciple orally, VII. *Māntrikii* (derived from the word *Mantra*) here Guru places the Mantra in different parts of his body and makes himself Mantra incarnate and initiates the disciple in that very Mantra, VIII. *Hotrii* (derived from the word *Hom*=fire sacrifice) here the Guru will perform the rites of fire sacrifice for purification of the body and mind of the disciple and initiates the disciple, IX. *Shāstrii* (*shāstra*=scriptures) here the Guru initiates a disciple engaged in serving the Guru and fond of worshipping deities, in accordance with scriptural

ordains, and X. *Abhishećikii* (Abhiskek= ablution with consecrated water) here Guru will perform Pujā of Shiva with his consort on a pitcher filled with water and sprinkle this consecrated on the disciple

2. *Shāktii Diksha*: In *Vāyaviya Samhitā* (a division of *Shiva Purān*. This scriptural text on Lord Shiva describes his lilas and glories in several cantos') this type of *Dikshā* is called *Jnānavatii* (*Jnān*= wisdom). Here the wisdom-incarnate Guru enters the body of the disciple by Yogic-Power and transfuses him with wisdom. This *Dikshā* requires no ceremonial rites and rituals.
3. *Shāmbhavii Dikshā*: In *Nityotsav* (a text which deals in detail with the processes of Pujā of Goddess *Lalitā or Mahā Tripurā Sundari*) *Umānandanātha*, the great exponent of *Kāshmir Shaivism* wrote that the Guru will contemplate on the red and white feet of *Kāmeshwari-Kāmeshwara* (the ultimate lord Shiva and his consort) couple on the crown of the disciple. Then he will further think that from these feet the exuding of nectar onto the disciple is washing out his both inner and outer impurities. The placement of the feet of the great lord and his consort on the crown of disciple is called *Shāmbhavii Dikshā*.

Q. Is Nyāsa (placement of Mantra in different parts of body) necessary for Japa practice?

A. The ultimate goal of Japa is to be one with the Mantra and the deity. In fact, a *Jiva* (sentient being) is Shiva. *Ma Anandamayee* said, “*Yatra Jiva tatra Shiva.*” and “*Yatra nāri tatra Gouri.*” That means where there is *Jiva* there is Shiva and where there is woman there is *Gouri* or the consort of Shiva. This attitude gets a firm hold in the mind of an aspirant by the process of *Nyāsa*. That is why *Nyāsa* is ordained to be obligatory in practice of Mantra.

Q. What are the other obligations in Japa practice?

A. *Dhyāna* (meditation) and *Prānāyāma* are the two most important obligations to be performed before doing Japa. *Prānāyāma* is also prescribed at the end of Japa. In *Saraswati Tantra* the following sequences are prescribed before Japa. First of all a *Sādhaka* (Aspirant) should remember his Guru. Worship and pay obeisance to him. Then sequentially he should perform the following processes as ordained in the scriptures such as- *Mantra-shikhā* (flame of Mantra), *Mantra-śaitanya* (Mantra consciousness), *Mantrārtha Bhāvanā* (contemplation on the meaning of Mantra), Meditation on the Guru at the thousand petals lotus at the crown of the head, Meditation on the deity at the heart, *Kullukā* (special Mantra specific for a deity used to sanctify the *Japa-Mantra*), *Mahāsetu* (great bridge) (a specific mantra for a deity linking the mantra with the deity like a great bridge), *Yoni-Mudrā Bhāvanā* (as described earlier), *Anganyāsa* (placement of the Mantra in parts at the different limbs of body), *Prānāyāma*, *Jihavā-Shodhan* (purification of tongue or mouth which remains generally in an impure state due to lying and improper use of words), *Prānāyoga* (uniting the vital life force with the Mantra), *Dipanii*(lighting up of the Mantra), *Ashouć-Bhanga* (*ashouć* means period of defilement due to birth or death, *Bhanga* means to break), *Nasagra-Drishti* (fixing the gaze at the tip of nose), *Setu-Japa* (like in *Maha-Setu*) , again *Setu-Japa*, again *Ashouć-Bhanga* and *Prānāyāma*. All these processes have special meanings and mystical significance, which are to be learnt and understood from the Guru only. These may vary according to the different schools of practice.

Q. What are the general rules and restrictions in doing Japa?

A. An aspirant interested in the practice of Japa is supposed to observe some rules and restrictions to achieve the cherished goal. As Japa is a spiritual practice of a high order, the practiser should undertake it seriously with utmost alertness, sincerity and faith. The following factors should be taken care of.

Āsana (posture) and seat: These are common to all spiritual practices. Yoga-Sutra says, “*Sthira sukhāsanam*” (*sthira*= fixed, *sukhāsanam*= comfortable body posture).

The aspirant should get used to a particular posture so that he can sit for a prolonged period of time without feeling any physical strain and discomfort. The seat should be three feet by three feet in size, made of successive layers of *Kusha-Grass*, skin of naturally dead animal and cotton cloth. It should be at least two inches higher from the ground level. These are the general specifications prescribed in *Meru Tantra*. The composition of the seat may vary in accordance with the purpose of Japa. For wisdom Black - deer skin, for general purpose - tiger skin, for recovery from ailments - sheep skin, for nourishment - *Kusha-grass* and for wealth - cane seats are recommended. For various incantations with harmful designs skins of elephant, buffalo, sheep, rhinoceros, cow and jackal are used.

Place of Japa: In the *Gita* (Ch.6, Shl. 11) it said, “*Shuśou deshe pratisthāpya sthiram āsanam.....*) i.e. the seat should be placed there in a clean and sanctified place. Without going into details of innumerable selections of places it can simply be said that the clean and sanctified place where the mind feels composed and cheerful is the best for spiritual practice.

Time of Japa: This has been discussed previously in connection with *Nitya* and *Naimittik Japa*. In addition to routine obligations for an initiated aspirant, as such, there are no other time restrictions because; one of the purposes of Japa is constant remembrance of God. In *Rudra Yāmal* it is said that Japa of *Shakti Mantra* (Mantra related to Goddess) at night is more fruitful.

Rhythm of Japa: Japa should not be too fast or too slow. There should be clarity of the sound of the Mantra and a fixed rhythm.

Number of Japa: Routine *Sandhyā Upāsanā* after initiation is a commitment for the lifetime of an aspirant. The firm resolves as to the number of routine Japa taken after initiation by an aspirant by himself or ordained by the Guru should be fulfilled at all costs. *Naimittik Japa* that means Japa on special occasions or during auspicious moments should be undertaken after having a firm resolve regarding the number of Japa. In *Purashćaran* (ceremonial Japa-ritual observed with strict rules and disciplines accompanied by *Pujā*, (a) *Hom* (fire oblations), (b) *Abhishek*(ablutions)and (c) *Tarpan*(sprinklings) with consecrated water and (d) *Brāhman Bhojan* (feeding Brāhmins), as directed in scriptures, in order to awaken/energize the potency of a Mantra) numbers play very important roles. Here the number of Japa is determined by the number of letters/syllables contained in a Mantra. Generally one hundred thousand times the numbers of

letter/syllable are prescribed for Japa followed by steps (a), (b), (c) and (d) respectively. Number of fire oblations should be 1/10 the number of japa

Number of ablutions.....1/10..... fire
ablutions

Number of sprinkling.....1/10.....ablutions

Number of Brāhmin
feeding.....1/10.....sprinkling.

For example, the Vedic *Gāyatri Mantra* (having 24 letters) 2.4 million Japa followed by the successive steps with prescribed numbers are required for *Purashćaran*.

Routine Japa is classified into three categories, ten thousand as *Uttam* (superior), one thousand as *Madhyam* (Medium) and one hundred eight as *Adham*(inferior). It is not advisable to do Japa less than 108.

Q. What is the use of the rosary (Mala) in Japa?

A. Rosaries or *Mālās* help in keeping the number. Use of rosaries in different religions like *Suiġsm*, *Tāntric Buddhism*, *Shikhism*’ and even in Christianity are not uncommon. Rosary is considered to be a sacred tool for doing Japa. Proper use and maintenance of sanctity of the rosary should be taken care of. There are certain rules and restrictions regarding uses of rosaries. Usually there are 108 beads (*Mani*) stringed together in silk or cotton thread like a garland. There is an extra bead situated at the joint of two ends of the thread called the *Meru* (pole). A typical three and a half round coiled knot called *Granthi* separates each bead from the next one. During Japa the *Meru* should not be crossed . After completion of 108 recitations the *Meru* is reached. Without crossing it the *Mālā* is to be turned around and next turn of Japa should start from the 108th bead.

Q. What are the types of rosary generally used in Japa?

A. In *Sanātan* Indian traditions three types of rosaries are being used viz. *Varnamālā*, *Āaramālā* and *Karamālā*.

Varnamālā: Here the letters of Sanskrit alphabet represent the beads, the compound syllable “*Ksha*” makes the *Meru* and *Kundalini* is the thread of this rosary. The practiser is supposed to add the sound of *Anuswar* (nasal sound) to each of the letters of alphabet starting from “*ā*” and recite the Mantra and continue up to the last letter “*la*”. For once he should utter “*ksha*” and again recite backwards to end up with “*ā*” again. By this process one hundred recitations of the Mantra will be completed. Then he will divide the letters of alphabets into eight *Vargas*’ (categories) and adding *Anuswar* to the last letter of each category he should recite the Mantra. By this way his 108 recitations will be complete.

Āaramālā: This is also called as *Āala* or *Āanācala*. The beads may be of any one of the materials like *Rudrāksha*, Conch shell, Ivory, Lotus seed, Pearl, Quartz, Gold, Silver, Coral, Sandalwood (both red and white), *Tulsi* (Basil) wood, Root of *Kusha*-grass, *Gunjā*-seed, Turmeric, *Mahāshankha* (forehead bone of human skull), Teeth of a donkey, horse and man etc. Number of beads, bead materials and colour and type of threads are selected in accordance with specific purpose of Japa or as directed by the Guru.

Karamālā: (*Kar*=hand, *mālā*=rosary) Ten segments of fingers of hand are used as counting tools for Japa. There is a difference of opinion as to which of the segments are to be used in counting. Aspirants are supposed to follow the direction given by Guru after initiation.

There is another type of rosary called *Samsmaran–mālā* (*Samsmaran*=remembrance) generally composed 27 beads and a *Meru* used for continuous practice of Japa.

Q. Are there any prescribed rules and restrictions regarding the use of Mālā?

A. *Mālā* is not merely a tool for counting Japa. It is considered as sacred and its sanctity should be maintained while using it. Scriptural texts (Texts on Tantra in particular) prescribed certain rules and restrictions regarding the use of *Mālā*. To mention a few:-

1. It should be properly knotted and subsequently consecrated as ordained before use
2. Bead material is to be selected in accordance with specific Mantra and purpose of Japa.
3. Same *Mālā* cannot be used for different Mantras. For instance, in *Vaishnav-Mantra*, *Mālās* made of *Tulsiwood*, White Sandalwood, Lotus seed etc. are prescribed whereas in Shiva and *Shakti-Mantra*, *Mālās* made of *Rudrāhsha* and other materials are to be used. Of course Quartz *Mālā* can be used in both cases.
4. Utmost care should be taken so that movements of beads do not make any sound, *Mālā* should not slip away from finger grip during Japa and the thread should not be broken. A *Mālā* should not touch the ground or any other parts of the body during Japa.
5. A broken *Mālā* should again be freshly and properly knotted and consecrated before reuse. Extra 1008 or 108 recitations of the Mantra are suggested before reuse of the *Mālā*.
6. Movement of the beads should be guided by thumb and middle finger and the fore finger should be unused. In some incantations aiming to do harm the forefinger is used.
7. One is not supposed to be on the move with *Mālā* while doing *Nitya*, *Naimittik* and *Kāmya Japa*. For constant remembrance there is no such restrictions and a separate *Mālā* should be used for this.
8. An aspirant should not use anybody else's *Mālā* or should not allow anybody else to use his *Mālā*.
9. A *Mālā* should never be kept unused i.e. once an aspirant starts using a *Mālā* he should at least use it once a day. Otherwise the *Mālā* should be freshly re-consecrated or extra Japa should be done for deliberate or inadvertent lapses.

10. Generally a *Japa-Mālā* should not to be used as a necklace.

Q. You have said before that in Kali-Yuga Japa is most efficacious and simple spiritual practice. But after the brief discussions so far it seems that to achieve the desired results one has to go through many steps and fulfill rules which are not so easy. How do you explain that?

A. In a particular context Ma once said, “Path towards God is straight/simple (*saral*) and easy (*sahaja*)”. But our experiences are the opposite. In the history of spirituality irrespective of any religion we find that all the prophets and saints spoke about the hindrances and difficulties an aspirant has to face during his endeavor. Even the Veda says that the path of spirituality is like, “*Skhurasya dhāra nishit duratyayā durgam pathastāt kavoyo badanti.*” (*Skurasya*=of a razor, *dhārā*=edge, *nishit*= sharp, *duratyayā*=impassable/far reaching, *durgam*=difficult to tread, *pathah*=path, *kavoyo*=the seers, *tat*= that, *badanti*=say, that means, the path of spirituality is like the sharpened edge of a razor impassable to tread on and full of obstacles. This has been said by the seers of olden days.) This ties in with our actual experience but is opposed to what Ma had said.

Let us try to understand the meanings of the words ‘easy’, ‘straight’ and ‘simple’. Ma used the Bengali term ‘*Sahaja*’ (*saha*= along with; *ja*=*jāta*= born) that means to tread the path of spirituality is an in-born faculty of a person. Once he is convinced about this, he can go for it with ease. Behind every action lies the intention of the doer. Again the intention has its root in desire which is the objective manifestation of love within for the particular action. The doer first fixes a hypothetical goal and with knowledge, experiences gained so far and predetermined methods starts doing it. At the onset he may encounter difficulties but with practice he gets used to overcoming those with ease and efficiency and achieves the cherished goal.

Apparently the activities of life of a person start at birth. (For the time being activity starting from conception with prenatal growth are not taken into consideration to avoid further arguments and complexities) and difficulties come along until the apparent death ends life. To a new-born child even the first breath is a difficult task, which turns into an involuntary and effortless natural activity for the rest of its life.

In Ma's life we notice that the spiritual practices of various disciplines attained fulfillment on their own with ease without any external aids like a Guru, scriptures, philosophical understanding and primary preparation. She termed these as "*Sādhanār khelā*" (*Sādhanār*= of spiritual practice, *khelā*=play) that means, play of *sādhanā*. *Sādhanā* played through her physical and inner being, or *sādhanā* seemed to be a play to her. This again is apparently contradicting our usual understanding of spiritual practice. First of all a Guru, or the scriptures, caution an aspirant at the very onset of spiritual practice not to take it as a play. A practitioner is supposed to take up spiritual endeavor earnestly and with all seriousness and sincerity. Perhaps, Ma is the first in the spiritual history of the world to coin the term "Play of *sādhanā*".

Now let us try to understand what we mean by the word play. Play is to amuse oneself, or the expression of inner happiness in action. In other words it can be said that play is the expression of the inner love for the self. In play there is continuation of happiness throughout, from the beginning to the end irrespective of the final result. Play and competition are not the same. In competition happiness depends on the end result, when one wins, whereas in play there is happiness throughout. In competition one gives out energy, expertise and sincerity, but when one loses one feels pain and thinks that all efforts were futile. When happiness comes at the cost of someone else's pain it is not real happiness. In a competition the joy of victory causes the loser pain. In spiritual practice one should feel happy while pursuing it. Happiness in achieving the goal will come as a bonus as in the case of true play. In addition to love for the imaginary achievement or goal one needs to have love for the practice as well. Almost all our physical and mental faculties are acquired through the experience of interactions with the world outside. The only faculty everyone is born with is love. This is called *Sahaja*.

Q. How can one be in love with Japa practice? At times one feels bored in repeating the same word or Mantra. Is there any way to get rid of this boredom?

A. Of course, there is a way. What one needs is to look at one's actual life experience and try to apply it in his spiritual practice. Japa is another name for constant remembrance of the most beloved godhead. A child with very few

experiences or interactions with the diversified outside world has its love focused on the mother only and constantly remembers her. A young person spends hours, days, months and years together in constant remembrance of the date of the first love. A young mother in the midst of all her worldly actions and household chores has her attention focused on her new-born baby. In all these cases constant remembrance is an effortless action. But with time on the one hand the object of love changes and on the other hand more objects of love infiltrate into the mind. The single-minded attention or love becomes diversified. An exclusive relation is transformed into several relative relations.

Human mind is in constant search for the changeless love. But the changes both in the beloved and the lover in the temporal and the spatial frame of the world, come in the way of this changeless love. Now the question is, whether it is possible to stop these changes. The answer as such is negative. To find the way out, one needs to examine his experience of interactions with the objective world around and see whether there is any apparently changeless object or thought that he is in love with. The changes registered both in the subject and objects are of the names and forms only. At the surface it seems that love also changes with the changes in names and forms. But the fact is deeper than this. Take for example the love for dresses. One buys dresses of different colours and designs of ones choice. Apparently there are changes in the objective love but the fact is that the love for dress remains the same. Now let us consider love in a subjective way. You can find changes in yourself with the passage of time. These changes are noticed only when you put yourself in the spatial and temporal frame of the world objectively. To be more precise, changes are noticed only in the subject-object relationship. With time and situation your love seems to change with changes of objects but your love for object remains unchanged.

Now let us have a deeper look at boredom. Why do we feel bored? At the background of all boredom there lies an underlying sense of changeless self-love. In the pursuit of feeling the changeless love the mind is constantly probing different sense objects and has acquired the habit of seeking change. Therefore anything changeless apparently has its impact on mind compared with its developed shape, and this is called the feeling of boredom.

It is a transient world. All the objects (material and mental) are in the process of change both in temporal and spatial frames of conception. Sometimes these changes are so minute that the workable and gross sense organs cannot perceive them and the object seems to be changeless. But the fact is that, both

the perceiver and perceived are undergoing changes with respect to temporal and spatial frames. The lack of right mindfulness brings about the sense of changelessness.

Behind any action whatsoever (mental or physical) there lies the inner urge of the doer to have a taste of happiness. In other words it can be said that this inner urge is the indirect expression of self-love of the doer. To be rid of boredom one should try to go to the root of boredom -and it will be removed.

Q. Sometimes it happens that a seeker receives a mantra either in a dream or vision and he/she starts doing Japa of the mantra thus obtained. What do you say about that?

A. Yes, it is not uncommon that at times an aspirant receives a mantra in dream or vision and this creates doubts in his mind as to whether or not to practice this Japa. If the mantra in dream/vision does not tally with the mantra he had already received during initiation the person should first consult the Guru before doing anything with the mantra. Dreams are the outcome of *Sanskars* (Mind-set) within. The Guru only knows which of these *sanskars* are to be given prominence during the course of spiritual practice of his disciple. Besides, the sound thus obtained may not be complete in all respects so that it can be termed a mantra.

It has been said earlier that mantra is not mere sounds. A practiser is supposed to know and understand a mantra with all its limbs and meaning before working on it. I had been the witness to many such cases of seekers who received mantras in a dream and came to Ma asking for her guidance. In almost all the cases Ma would ask the person to get the mantra authenticated and sanctified by the respective Guru or an able person in his guru lineage in the physical absence of the Guru.

It may so happen that the mantra obtained in a dream is not at all related to the *Ista* (most beloved God-head) of an already initiated seeker. But an aspirant is supposed to have one-pointed attention on his *Ista-mantra* during spiritual practice. In that case the seeker will not be in a position to ascertain how to deal with this situation without the guidance of his preceptor or guru. Self suggestive spiritual practice may not give the desired result and at times the efforts may prove to be futile.

Q. What about a mantra in a dream or vision given by the Guru himself?

A. In that case too the mantra needs to be authenticated and sanctified either by the Guru personally or by an able person in the guru lineage in the physical absence of the guru.

Q. It is not uncommon to notice that a seeker practices a mantra received from a guru for sometime, then leaves both the guru and mantra and goes for alternatives. What is your comment in that case?

A. It has already been said that spiritual practices can be classified broadly into three categories such as, (1) *Nitya* (Daily routine), (2) *Naimityik* (Special occasions) and (3) *Kamyā* (with worldly desires). An initiated aspirant should undertake spiritual practice as a commitment for life. Once he embraces a Guru, mantra and a path he is not supposed to change these until the end. This kind of practice falls under the category of *Nitya* which should be the main stay in his spiritual path. For the other two categories a change is not unwelcome. Of course, even in such cases special *Diksha* and *Sankalpa* (firm resolve for undertaking such time-bound practices) are necessary.

An aspirant who changes his path and Guru may find excuses for doing so by referring to some scriptural texts. In *Kularnav Tantra* says, “*In search of knowledge a disciple should move from one Guru to another like a honey-bee moves from one flower to another in search of honey.*” In some other place the same scripture says, “*Never leave the Guru but follow his advice.*” Ma also said, “***Once embraced the Sad-Guru can never be left.***” Here we find apparent contradictions in scriptural texts in connection with the changing of a Guru. Without going into the details of treaties on the Guru as described in different scriptural texts one can say that the word Guru has its various meanings explaining different aspects of the Guru. Broadly Gurus are categorized into two classes, (1) *Diksa Guru* i.e. Guru of initiation and (2) *Shiksha Guru* i.e. Guru for gaining knowledge. Anyone from whom an aspirant can gain knowledge is a *Siksha Guru*, which is subject to change

according to need. But a *Diksha Guru* in general is not changeable unless the Guru himself asks or sends his disciple to some other Guru for further spiritual upliftment.

It has to be remembered that the term *Diksha* in the Vedas in general signifies a ceremony to be performed before undertaking any *Naimittik* and *Kamyā* Karma (as defined earlier) like special *Yajna* etc. In such cases the *Yajman* (the doer/host) has the freedom to select a competent conductor (*Rittvik*) of the rites and to get initiated by him. This type of *diksha* remains valid till the completion of the special ceremony.

Now let us consider a few points which could lead a disciple to think about changing his Guru.

Very often it is noticed that a disciple embraces a Guru from a passing impulse to have immediate or quick spiritual/worldly gains in a specific time frame. When he does not get the desired results, doubts crop up in his mind about the path as well as the Guru. Finally he tries to change the Guru.

Because of psychological involvement a disciple tries to keep a close association with the Guru. Here both reverence and infatuation act together. With time and interactions the different aspects of the behavioral patterns of both the Guru and disciple unfold. Sometimes this may be the cause of the changes in initial attitudes and the disciple wants to distance himself from the Guru.

In certain cases the Guru fails to assess the physiological as well as the mental constitutions of the disciple and prescribes practices which may not be best suited for the disciple. The disciple also sometimes asks for practices for a self-chosen path, which ultimately does not stand him in good stead for continuing to the goal - and he starts searching for an alternative

To tread the path of spirituality is like walking on a Razor's edge. It was said in *Shvetashvatar Upnishad* that the path of an aspirant is like "*skhurasya dhara nishit duratyaya durgam pathastat kavoyoh vadanti*" (*Skhurasya*= of razor, *dhara*= edge, *nishit*= sharp, *duratyaya*= far reaching, *durgam*= full of obstacles, *kavoyoh*= the seers of the past, *vadanti* = say) i.e. to follow the spiritual path is like walking on a razor's edge; this is far reaching and full of obstacles as told by the seers of the past.

An aspirant is required to have a strong conviction for the path and should be committed to the goal for his whole life. A seeker, having so many worldly duties and preoccupations, cannot maintain unperturbed focus on his spiritual goal. He is always in search of a short cut to achieve his goal within a time frame. When it does not happen with a particular Guru and path, he looks to change.

Q. It is a common complaint of spiritual seekers that while engaged in Japa the mind roams about ceaselessly on different objects and causes disturbances. Are there any specific instruction given by Ma to over come this?

A. It is difficult to generalize Ma's instructions. Whatever had come out of Ma's lips was in response to a specific query by a particular aspirant. Her advice varied from person to person. Compiled below are a few of her instructions regarding Japa which can be considered somewhat generalized instructions:-

(A). Sthir asan, sthir dristi, Japa ashray, tabei raser asha.

Sthir asan(fixed posture/seat):- Here Ma pointed out the necessity of having a fixed sitting posture while doing japa. It is to be noted that the seat on which Japa is practiced should not be changed as far as practicable. In all the texts on Yoga, the importance of seats and postures were discussed in meticulous

detail. In the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, the third limb of Yoga of eight limbs is the asana. It says, “*sthir sukhasanam*” i.e. the posture as well as the seat should be fixed and comfortable.

Sthir dristi (fixed look):- Here *dristi* means both external and internal look. Closed eyes can negate the external visual distraction but the hyperactive and interactive sanskars within do not allow the mind to settle down. A focused mental occupation like contemplation on the meaning of the mantra is also necessary. The Yoga Sutra said, “*tajjapam tadartha bhavanam.*” (contemplation on the meaning of the very mantra of Japa)

Japa ashray (*Japa as tool/resort*):- Japa is one of the most efficacious tools for controlling the mind. According to Ma one should take resort to Japa to arrest the uncontrollable movements of mind.

Tabei raser asha:- Then only there is hope for enjoying the nectar/essence of spiritual practice.

B. Yadi jape beshikshan thakte icchs kare tabe shabder upar lakshya rekhe jap. Akshar rupe bhagavan, shabdarupe bhagavan. (If one wishes to do Japa for a long time then it should be done being attentive to the *shabda*. God is represented as sound and syllable as well). The meaning of the term *shabda* includes both sound and syllable.

Here Ma was very clear about the usefulness of contemplation in Japa practices and hinted at the options on contemplation. One may focus attention either on the sound or on the syllable of the mantra.

The syllable/syllables of a mantra are fixed for a particular language. But the sound generally does not change. It has to be noted that the pronunciation of a mantra differs from person to person and apparent variations of sound may be noticed. For example, a mantra may be common in both classical Indian *tantric* order and in *Tibetan tantric* Buddhism but the syllables and sounds

are different. These differences do not affect the potency and efficacy of the mantra.

C. At times it seems very difficult to contemplate on the meaning of the mantra simultaneously with japa. In that case the meaning of the mantra should be contemplated on first. One should also think that this meaning is fully reflected in the mantra.

Here Ma is giving some tips to overcome some of the practical difficulties an aspirant generally faces during japa practice. Right mindfulness is complementary to successful japa and *vice versa*. In the conscious level registration of thoughts follows close sequences. As such it may seem that thoughts float on the surface of consciousness simultaneously which cannot be registered separately because of very close sequence. The mind fixes itself alternately between japa and contemplation on the meaning of the mantra thereby making japa a mechanical process. Here Ma suggests that first the mind should be conditioned by contemplation followed by doing japa.

D. “Nishwās praswāse sahaj bhāve nām kariy jāoyā.”(*Nishwās*= inhalation; *prashwāse*= in exhalation; *sahaj bhāve*=in natural way, *nām*= Name of God; here *nām* signifies mantra; *kariyā jāoyā*= should be continued; that is to say, japa of the name of God or the mantra should be continued along with natural breathings. In another occasion Ma said, ***“Shwāser dike lakshya rākhiya Jap.”*** (*Shwāser*= of breathing; *dike*= towards; *lakshya*= focus; *rākhiya*= keeping on; that means, japa should be performed keeping focus on the breathing.) These two sayings of Ma are of primary importance in japa practice. Theoretically, the sayings are in simple and understandable language. But to practice japa in accordance with Ma’s suggestion requires detailed consideration.

Prānāyāma is thought to be the most effective tool for the concentration of mind. In almost all the spiritual practices irrespective of any particular order pranayama was upheld as an obligatory tool to start with. In the books on Yoga {Astānga Yoga (Yoga with eight limbs) in particular} there are detailed treatises on different *prānāyāmas*’ and their methods, all of which require

rigorous practice under the direct guidance and supervision of an able master. To have mastery over these various *Prānāyāma* calls for a lifetime dedication and endeavor.

Here Ma, without mentioning any name, hinted at one of the easiest methods of *prānāyāma* called *sahaj prānāyāma* or natural rhythmic breathing. There are so many gross and subtle factors (both mental and physical) which influence the normal breathing rhythm. Without going into the complex biochemical mechanisms which are dependant on so many interrelated criteria, now let us consider in brief the relation between mental activities and breathing. Any activity, mental or physical requires energy and this energy is being released by the complex biochemical enzyme-catalyzed reactions within the body. It is a well established fact that substrate \leftrightarrow product reversible/irreversible enzyme-catalyzed transformation can be explained in terms of electrons transfer mechanism between reactants and products which require oxygen. This oxygen is supplied mainly by breathing. Naturally oxygen input is directly proportional to the output of energy and this energy in turn controls the both physical and mental activities. Conversely it can also be said that any change in mental activities has its direct influence on breathing. So it can be said that controlled or regulated biochemical reaction within an organism results in regulated release /absorption of energy which in turn effects both mental and physical actions. External oxygen supply is one of the key factors for these processes. *Prānāyāma* or regulated breathing to a greater extent helps maintaining a dynamic equilibrium in the biochemical reactions within. Breathing as such is an involuntary natural process. Its change in rhythm is also dependant on so many other inter-related mental and physical factors. Japa can be used as an ideal tool to bring in automatic regulation in rhythmic breathing. An aspirant can fix the number of repetitions of a mantra or *Nāma* in the time lengths of inhalation and exhalation. This will automatically regulate the rhythm of breathing which will have a direct influence on the mind in maintaining a dynamic equilibrium in its activities avoiding erratic mental behavior. This will be further discussed in the context of *Practical hints for Successful Japa*

E. “*Shwāser dikē lakshya rekhē Jap.*” (*Shwaser*= of breathing; *dike*=towards; *lakshya*=focus; *rekhe*=keeping) i.e. Japa should be practiced while keeping focus on the (rhythm) of breathing.

Since simultaneous focus on Japa and breathing being impracticable this saying of Ma can be interpreted in two ways. Once the number of repetitions of the mantra or nama are fixed in the time lengths of inhalation and exhalation, an aspirant can focus his attention either towards (a) Sound/Syllable of the mantra or (b) the rhythm of breathing.

F. “Man lāguk nā lāguk japa dhyāna smaran kariāi jāoā.”

(*Man*= mind; *lāguk*=get adhere to; *nā lāguk*= not get adhere to; *smaran*=remembrance; *kariāi*=verily to be worked on; *jāoā*=to proceed.) Whether the mind gets fixed in it or not, remembrance of (God’s name), japa and dhyana should be continued.

G. “Susthē asusthē anukul pratikul tākān nā”.

(*Susthē*=in good health; *asusthē*=in sickness; *anukul*=favourable condition; *pratikul*=adverse situations; *tākān*=pay attention to; *nā*= no) Whether in good health or in sickness and whether situations are favourable or unfavourable one should not pay attention to these. That means come what may an aspirant should not pay attention to anything but japa. Spiritual practices in any discipline need some primary mental and physical preparation, congenial atmosphere and favourable situations. Physical disability and indisposition are some of the determining factors for successful spiritual practice. But japa can be pursued at any time and in any situation. Ma further said, “*Do you stop having a dip because of the sea waves? You finish the bath by plunging into the waves. Likewise try to be with His (God) remembrance and japa in the midst of worldly turmoil.*”