

Receiving a Personal Mantra

The practice of reciting a divine name or sound in meditation can be found in many of the world's great spiritual traditions. It is said to purify the mind and gradually lead to freedom from attachment and suffering. The yoga tradition has carefully preserved such an internal practice for over four millennia in a comprehensive science called the science of mantra. In yoga, the repetition of a mantra is an important method for calming and centering the conscious mind and thus awakening a deeper awareness of the indwelling self.

The first mantra given to a student is the mantra soham (pronounced so-hum). This mantra is coordinated with the breath and is suitable for every student. It is thus called a "universal" mantra. After a period of meditation training and practice many students are ready to receive a personal mantra. A personal mantra is given through a process of initiation. The mantra is revealed specifically for the individual student and becomes an internal focus that guides and protects the student in meditation and in daily life. The personal mantra is private and is not shared with anyone but the person receiving it.

Many students note that receiving a personal mantra is an important step in creating a stable meditation—one that persists through the ups and downs of life. The mantra can be chanted aloud, or recited quietly, but it is most effective when it is allowed to reverberate in the mind without being externalized. The mantra then becomes a familiar inner focus which is both reassuring and a source of energy and inspiration.

A personal mantra is usually not coordinated with the breath but resonates naturally in the mind. In meditation, the mantra is brought to awareness and mentally repeated. Sometimes the repetitions are counted (this is termed japa) with a string of beads called mala.

Before requesting a personal mantra we suggest:

1. Complete two eight week classes in yoga, or one eight week class in meditation to learn the basics of practice.
2. Use Dr. Sovik's two guided relaxation/meditation tapes available in the bookstore to establish a home practice with the mantra soham.
3. Practice for a period of time to deepen your home routine. You may wish to read *The Power of Mantra and the Mystery of Initiation* by Pandit Rajmani Tigunait for more information about the role of mantra in yoga practice.

Then, to receive a mantra, ask for an initiation application from the office. We will schedule you for an individual appointment that lasts about 20 minutes. In our tradition, a student is asked to make an offering at the time of initiation. The suggested offering is \$50 and it goes toward one of the charitable projects of the International Institute. There is a long-standing observance that the giving of a mantra must not be for the financial benefit of the teacher who gives it.

The opportunity to receive a personal mantra is an important aspect of yoga. It is said that among the practices of yoga (and more generally of spiritual life), the silent repetition of one's mantra is the most effective means of stilling the mind. Its purpose is to lead us to the center of awareness, the Divine consciousness within.