

Thursday, 31 October 2024

Ashtakshari Mantra

When I was studying with my guru, I initially approached him as a researcher, documenting his teachings and treatments, particularly his work in treating snake bites. For around six months, I observed him daily, recording his work with an audio recorder and cameras, aiming to share his knowledge with the world. I didn't participate in any rituals; my role was solely that of an observer. However, one day as I was leaving his home, he called me back and asked, "Vijith, are you starting to get light?" I was taken aback, as I never expected such a question. It marked a turning point in my journey.

In Indian tradition, "getting light" is a profound concept. The purpose of a teacher is not simply to impart knowledge but to provide tools so one can realize the truth independently. I had been focused on what I could gather from him daily, yet his question made me see that the true essence of learning is in receiving light, or insight. A true guru shares this light, and after half a year of observing and sitting with him, I have learned that it's about allowing the practice to take root within oneself. Being in proximity to someone who embodies the practice offers a unique momentum that is shared with you.

This concept of gaining light can be compared to learning to drive. You can buy a car and try to learn on your own, but learning from someone who already knows how makes the process much safer and more profound.

The Importance of Spiritual Discipline

My guru would often ask, "What is the importance of spiritual practice?" Many answers came to mind, like discipline, health, and clarity. But he always emphasized one purpose: **to make the right decision at the right time**. Through the Gayatri mantra, we pray for the stimulation of our intelligence, and true intelligence is the capacity for sound decision-making. When our decision-making is aligned with the cosmic intelligence, we can trust it fully.

As a toxicologist, even a minor error in my guru's decisions could be life-threatening. This is why he would spend every free moment in chanting and meditation, anchoring himself in that cosmic consciousness. The Gayatri mantra focuses on meditating on the creative and stimulating force of the universe, while the mantra "Om Namō Narayana" focuses on the sustaining force of the universe. In essence, Gayatri is about stimulation, and Om Namō Narayana is about amplification, making this stimulation more abundant and profound.

The Structure of Mantra Practice

Each mantra has a unique structure. When we chant, we place different elements in specific areas: the deity or god of the mantra in the heart, the meter or melody in the mouth, and the

seer (Rishi) or the consciousness of the saint at the crown of the head. In the case of Gayatri, we are meditating on the universal soul, which manifests as the sustaining force, often referred to as Vishnu or Paramatma. This supreme soul exists in each of us, manifesting in all beings and elements around us. Vishnu, in this sense, is our own soul, the soul in every being, and together it forms Paramatma, the one universal soul.

Exploring Om Namō Narayana

“Om Namō Narayana” can be seen as an evolution of the Gayatri mantra. In this mantra, “Om” represents creation, sustenance, and dissolution. “Namō” signifies bowing down with respect. “Nara” means human, while “Ayana” relates to the channels (srotas) of the body. Narayana, then, is the one who dwells in the channels of human beings. This concept highlights the importance of these channels as they distribute life force, energy, memory, and transformation within the body. Through the channels, external substances like food transform continuously until they become consciousness. This transformative force is the fire, or Pitta, in the body, which embodies the soul’s energy.

In Ayurveda, we recognize this transformative power as the sustaining force, and in spiritual practice, it’s an invitation to bow down to the transformative, sustaining consciousness within us and the universe. Chanting “Om Namō Narayana” repeatedly with this awareness brings us closer to our true selves and to this sustaining energy within all life.

The Essence of Receiving a Mantra

Receiving a mantra from a master who embodies its essence is fundamentally different from merely hearing it. When a mantra is passed down through an experienced practitioner, it carries an energy that resonates deeply. Traditionally, mantras were kept secret, passed from teacher to disciple, and though times have changed, the reverence for this transmission remains essential.

In our practice, we focus on the Gayatri, Om Namō Narayana, and the upcoming mantra dedicated to Shiva, which completes this transformative process.

