

choosing a mantra

So, perhaps you don't have a guru or teacher you can ask for a *mantra*. How do you choose a *mantra* for yourself? Start with what you are attracted to naturally. I went through a year of just chanting to *Krishna*. I got started chanting it and then I couldn't stop. It was so freeing. I had been in a very disciplined tradition which did not explore the heart. My heart was hardened. The *Krishna* energy came in and opened up my heart. It was such a new experience, I just wanted to hang out there.

The energies from these deities are appropriate at different times in your life. You may stick with *Ram* year after year, but you may not. You don't have to be a die-hard fan. There are no allegiances. It's all good. You should stick with one *mantra* or tradition long enough to know what it has to offer. And only you know how long that is.

And then your life will change. At a time when you are experiencing loss, it might be good to tie into *Kali* or *Shiva* chanting. It might be appropriate at a time when you are trying to process tremendous amounts of grief. "How in the world am I going to process this?" It's too much. Go to the source. *Durge, Durge, Durge Jai Jai Ma*. If life is going to rip you to shreds, you might as well honor the force at work. Worship it, dive into it, understand it, let it renew you.

There are different ways you can apply the energy of the deities to your life. If you want to select a *mantra*, you can look at your life and think about what energy is needed in your life at that point. Are you trying to create something new? *Brahma*. Are you trying to flower what you already have? You may want to sustain your yoga practice, or keep your yoga center and classes going - *Ram* is the one for you. You have a vision, a seed, something that hasn't manifested yet - chant to *Saraswati*. Let the vision come into reality.

You will be naturally attracted to one over the other. You'll hear a *mantra* on a CD and you'll call a friend and say, "Wow, did you hear that *Om Namah Shivaya* chant?" They will not feel the same passion. It's your attraction to the *mantra* that should guide you. If you are attracted to it, sing it all day long.

Kirtan should come to you naturally, through your soul... You should sing devotional music in a way that stirs the heart, in harmony and with a slow rhythm. Whenever you make music, singing or playing, it should leave a memory on the mind. Whatever you do, wherever you are, repeat the name of the Lord... It is like nectar, feed everyone with this nectar...

- Baba Haidakhan

Ganesh for removing obstacles. *Ganesh* chants are often done at the start of projects and musical programs. *Ganesh* opens doors.

Brahama and *Saraswati* are for starting things. They are the source of creation.

Ram and *Sita*, *Krishna* and *Radha* are for sustaining and nourishing existing relationships, projects and businesses. To me, chants to these deities are like food, very nourishing and sustaining.

Krishna for unending love.

Lakshmi for money and wealth.

Shiva and *Kali* for embracing what's falling apart and for new beginnings, the phoenix rising out of the ashes kind of thing. These deities create undisturbed energy for diving deep into meditation or solitude.

Divine Mother for whatever you need from the beautiful divine mother.

Hanuman for unleashing supreme devotion, enthusiasm and power.

A celestial sage named Narada was a loud singer who loved to sing sacred songs on his journeys across the heavens. He always carried a veena, a sitar-like instrument which hung from his shoulders, and he liked to think of himself as a fairly skilled musician. One day he came upon a group of extraordinary beings in the forest who were writhing in agony. Narada asked them the cause of their suffering. The creatures said they were personifications of various ragas (musical modes) and were being tormented by Narada's inept renditions of their form. Shocked and awakened by the deep impact his music had on their spirit, Narada promised to study further before singing or playing music again in a haphazard manner. This was very well and good, but the ragas beings still needed to be healed. Someone had to sing the ragas with skill and perfection, and caress and soothe the raga beings back to life. A concert had to be performed. But who would play? Narada needed to find someone capable of healing through sound, with perfect skill and tenderness of heart. Such a perfect musician could only be Lord Shiva. Shiva of course had no reservations about giving an impromptu concert, but for his perfect music, he needed a perfect listener who could appreciate and grasp the subtle nuances of his delightful renderings. Thus he requested Brahma and Vishnu to be his audience. They readily agreed. As soon as Shiva struck his first note, the ragas started healing. It had a visual affect on his divine listeners too. Identifying totally with the soft and melting notes of Shiva's symphony, Vishnu actually started melting himself. Noticing this, Brahma scooped whatever liquid dripped from Vishnu and deposited it in his water pot (kamandalu). From this he delightfully fashioned a beautiful girl. This maiden, because of the auspicious circumstances of her birth, was especially refined herself, and she purified everything she came in contact with. She was Ganga. The Ganges river is named after her, and she flows from the Himalayas into Northern India, healing all she comes in contact with.