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The Path of Concentrative Meditation: Transcendental Meditation and Other Mantra-Based Forms

Me he makani hulilua la, huli ka mana'o, hele ka no'ono'o. (Like the wind that blows one way and then blows another, so does the mind turn and the thoughts depart.)

‘Ōlelo No‘eau no. 2155 (Pukui, 1983, p. 235)

Concentrative meditations, also referred to as “shutting down of awareness” forms of meditation (Naranjo & Ornstein, 1971; Goleman, 1988), restrict awareness to a single, unchanging source of stimulation or attention for a definite period. This is usually achieved by focusing attention on an external object (for example, a burning candle, vase, source of light, bell or other sound, or an image, such as a cross), or the repetition of a word or words during meditation. And the meditator is constantly returning one’s wandering mind to the target object of attention.

WHAT IS MANTRA MEDITATION?

Mantra-based meditation is one of the most common concentrative meditations. The word “mantra” has a wide variety of different meanings—both meditation and nonmeditation related. A dictionary definition of meditation-related mantra is “a sacred verbal formula repeated in prayer, meditation, or incantation, such as an invocation of a god, a magic spell, or a syllable or portion of scripture containing mystical potentialities” (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, n.d.).

Jayaram V (n.d.) describes in detail the origins and manifestations of Hindu-based mantras over the millennia. Mantras were originally contained in ancient Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas. “Mantra is a Sanskrit word consisting of the root ‘man’ meaning ‘manas’ or ‘mind’; and the suffix ‘-tra’ meaning ‘tool.’ Hence, a literal translation is ‘mind-tool’” (V, n.d.). By most accounts, the Vedas are purported to be 2,500 to 3,500 years old (Violatti, 2013). Another definition of mantra: “Literally an ‘instrument’ (tra) of

thought (man), defined variously in English as a prayer, hymn, or song of praise, sacred formula, incantation or charm. A mantra may be meaningful or have no meaning” (Rosen, 2007).

Thus, a mantra can be understood as “a mind-tool to liberate the mind.” A mantra can be as short as a single letter, a single word, or as long as a complete sentence (Rosen, 2007). In addition, there is a widespread belief in Hinduism that “particular mantra sounds bestow certain benefits or are appropriate to special types of persons” (Goleman, 1988, p. 67; see also Tehan, 2012, for an elaboration regarding the power of sound vibrations in bija mantra meditation). Through focused meditation, mantras are intended to deliver the mind from illusion and from material inclinations.

My practical and operational definitions of the word “mantra” that I share with clients include these:

- A mantra is a word or phrase or sound that is repeated, time and again.
- The mantra itself might or might not have any meaning.
- The mantra might or might not be derived from one of the world’s religious systems and might or might not have a spiritual reference or meaning.
- A mantra can be as short as a single letter or word, as long as a complete sentence or two, or something in between.
- The sound of the mantra is important in that it is repeated innumerable (silently or out loud) during meditation. Hence, it will have a noticeable impact on the mind and on physiological functioning.

Traditionally, mantra meditation occurs at a previously scheduled time and typically, though not exclusively, in a solitary setting. While repeating the mantra over and over during meditation, there is a simple (yet challenging to maintain) instruction: *As soon as the meditator is aware that he or she is no longer focused on the mantra, attention is returned to the mantra.*

The most common forms of mantra meditation in the West appear to be TM, the relaxation response, and centering prayer. The TM organization considers TM to be a unique form of meditation and not just a variant of mantra meditation (to be discussed later in this chapter). A fourth type of mantra meditation is clinically standardized meditation (CSM). I will briefly describe the relaxation response and CSM in this chapter (but neither is a focus of this book).

I go into some detail about TM for two reasons. First, TM is by far the most practiced form of mantra meditation in Western countries. Second, I

can offer considerable (subjective) insight and nuances about TM based on my several decades of experience practicing TM—both in pure TM fashion and then in a hybrid form (I also discuss some of my personal experience with TM in the preface and in the preceding chapter).

SELECTION AND USAGE OF A MANTRA

The selection and usage of a mantra is, of course, central to the practice of all mantra-based forms of meditation. The method for selecting a mantra is typically determined by the specific form of mantra meditation. In my own practice with clients, I use a pragmatic approach to mantra selection that offers clients the choice to select a mantra that (a) is not based on any faith or belief in a higher power or higher life force (that is, secular in nature) or (b) is faith based.

Secular or Non-Faith-Based Mantras

Clients might prefer a mantra-based form of meditation that is not part of any specific religion or tradition or that is not faith based at all. If so, a common instruction is to select a mantra that is easily repeated and pleasant sounding or that might have special significance to the meditator. In my practice, I encourage clients to choose their own mantra, without any particular restrictions. Simply because of the ease of repeating, I do suggest (but do not insist on) choosing a single word or sound or a short phrase up to several words. Following are mantras frequently chosen by clients in my private practice:

- **Commonly chosen single words:** “joy,” “peace,” “love,” “calm,” “hope,” “serenity,” “relax,” “happiness,” “courage,” “strength,” “patience,” “focus.”
- **Commonly chosen short phrases:** “Peace begins with me,” “This, too, shall pass” or “This shall pass,” “I can do this,” “I am in charge of me.”

Individual clients frequently choose mantras to suit their particular person and situation:

- “Smile, it is good for me” (selected by a client who complains a lot and tends to see the negatives).
- “I am courageous and I am strong” (selected by a client who has issues with feeling weak and unable to make positive choices in her life).
- “Peace in my heart” (selected by a client who feels tense and depressed much of the time).

- “Be energized” (selected by a client who suffers from persistent depressive disorder [dysthymia]).
- “I’m OK” (selected by a client who frequently is being told by her partner that she is inadequate, not OK).

Case Study: Bubba

Context: Weedwacker and Mantra in Sync. Bubba* suffers from chronic anxiety and finds it extremely difficult to relax. This is even the case when he works out in the yard, something he used to enjoy doing. I introduced Bubba to four alternative types of meditation, and he found mantra meditation to be most helpful. He chose the mantra “Peace begins with me” and began practicing it on a near-daily basis.

Intervention and Result. Recently, Bubba told me, “While out in my yard last week using my weed wacker, I kept repeating my mantra, ‘Peace begins with me.’ I kept repeating, ‘Peace begins with me,’ ‘peace begins with me,’ ‘peace begins with me,’ and I did it in sync with the sweeping of my weed wacker—back and forth, back and forth, back and forth . . . It was really relaxing.”

Mantra with No Meaning. Alternatively, some forms of meditation encourage practitioners to consider a mantra with no meaning whatsoever. A common rationale for selecting a mantra without meaning is to reduce thoughts or distractions associated with having a mantra that has some significance to the meditator. Another perspective is that ancient mantras do not inherently have any specific meaning. Their power is not in the words themselves; rather, it is in the sound vibrations created either when the mantra is spoken verbally or when it is formed in the mind and not expressed out loud. For example, “om” and “aum” are considered by many to be the most ancient of sounds. Indeed, om has been described as “the root of all mantras” or “the sound of the universe,” and it has been said that all other sounds are contained in it” (Ram Dass, 2013; see also Insight State, 2016). Also, some people believe that “amen” is a more modern derivative of om and aum.

Using Aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism in a Secular Way. Hindu-based mantra forms of meditation, of course, are embedded in the beliefs and practices of Hinduism. Similarly, Buddhist forms such as mindfulness meditation are embedded in the beliefs and practices of Buddhism. However, as is

*Please note that all names of clients or people mentioned as examples throughout the book, such as in the various case studies, are pseudonyms, to protect confidentiality.

discussed in chapter 4, this does not mean that a meditator has to believe in Hinduism or Buddhism to derive benefits from meditating in traditions that derive from Hinduism or Buddhism—nor perhaps from any other faith-based form of meditation.

Instead, one can take a secular approach to religion-based forms of meditation and engage in the practice of meditation without believing in its religious origins. For example, these days many continuing education offerings about mindful meditation emphasize that anyone can practice mindful meditation without believing in Buddhism. In this regard, I go into some detail about secular Buddhism, and the selection of faith-based mantras, in the previous chapter.

TM

TM is described as a distinctive approach, and it has had worldwide popularity for many years. Also, it has its share of both enthusiastic supporters and critics. Finally, as is described shortly, TM proponents contend that TM is not just one form of mantra-based meditation; rather, it is a unique form of meditation. (Other meditation experts strongly disagree with this assertion.) Arguably, TM can be considered a form of mantra meditation, and hence it is included in this chapter.

TM adherents contend that the mantras assigned in TM are special, authentic, and known to have life-supportive, harmonizing (sound vibrational) effects that facilitate the process of transcending. They also believe that TM-provided mantras should not be associated with any meaning, an important factor to facilitate transcending.

TM is described as “turning the attention inward towards the subtler levels of a thought until the mind transcends the experience of the subtlest state of the thought and arrives at the source of thought” (Yogi, 1969, p. 470). It is emphasized that TM is unique in that it is “effortless,” that is, does not “use concentration or effort” (Eswar, 2015; see also Goleman, 1988). The result is “effortless transcending of the meditation process” and automatically leading to the experience of “consciousness itself” (Vidal, 2015). In doing so, your mind settles “inward, beyond thought, to experience the silent reservoir of energy, creativity and intelligence found within everyone” (Eswar, 2015, para. 3). TM describes this as a “natural state of restful alertness,” a state that is reputedly unique among all forms of meditation (Eswar, 2015).

TM further asserts that this combination of a specific mantra fit for each initiate and the TM instructions of how to meditate in the repetition of the mantra for 20 minutes, twice daily, makes TM unique and more impactful compared with any other mantra meditation or any other type of

meditation. Many do disagree with these assertions. For example, Goleman (1988) described how TM “is a classic Hindu mantra meditation in a modern Western package” that “is an updated restatement of the basic teaching of Sankaracharya’s eighth-century Advait school of Vedantic thought” (p. 66).

The meditator is instructed to have an attitude of “neutral awareness” toward any distractions, such as thoughts. When the meditator becomes aware of distracting thoughts, he or she is instructed to gently return to focus (only) on the mantra itself. The emphasis is on avoiding “effortful” concentration or attention on the mantra. In effect, “this process is one of becoming one-pointed, though concentration is passive rather than forced” (Goleman, 1988, p. 69).

From my own personal experience with practicing pure TM for over 20 years, and then various forms of mantra-based meditation over the past 20 years, I do not doubt claims regarding the impact of the proper practice of TM. Part of the argument that TM is unique is that the mantra assigned is by virtue of the TM instructor’s knowledge. This instructor secretly assigns a mantra specifically selected for the individual applicant following introductory sessions with the applicant. When I was initiated into TM, I did not know that only a small number of mantras (reportedly less than 20 out of the 20,000 plus available in the Vedic scripture) are assigned by a TM teacher to his or her new initiates.*

Recognizing that there are differing viewpoints about whether TM is unique among mantra-based forms of meditation, it is hard to argue with the merits of its approach. As Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1969) wrote, TM is “turning the attention inward towards the subtler levels of a thought until the mind transcends the experience of the subtlest state of the thought and arrives at the source of thought” (p. 470). To the extent that it is true that we are what we think, then the practice of TM is very powerful indeed.

IS THERE A CONFLICT BETWEEN A TM MANTRA AND CHRISTIANITY?

This is a contentious issue that I discuss in chapter 4. TM is taught and practiced as a secular form of meditation, yet it is derived from ancient Hindu roots. Similarly, many non-Buddhists practice mindfulness meditation as a secular form of meditation (Heller, 2015).

*A former TM teacher runs the *TM-Free Blog*, which is critical of TM and describes how mantras were chosen (Laurie, 2013). For less emotionally charged evaluative commentary about TM, see Okeke (n.d.), Clarke (n.d.), and Doughney (n.d.). For a Christian-based critical analysis of TM, see General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God (1976). Goleman (1988) also confirmed that people who fall into such general categories as age and education are, indeed, given the same mantra.

On the other hand, some believe that anyone using a Hindu-based mantra associated with a Hindu god is, in no uncertain terms, “praying” to a non-Christian entity and that this practice inherently conflicts with Christian-based beliefs and practices. Because of these starkly contrasting perspectives, it is important to address this issue, especially with faith-based clients.

FAITH-BASED MANTRAS

Thich Nhat Hanh (1969) paraphrased St. Marcarius’s description of “the perfect meditation” for Christians: “The saving and blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling without interruption in you” (p. x). There is an “interior recollection, abandoning distracting thoughts and humbly invoking the name of Jesus with all your heart.” Using “Jesus” in this way is an example of a faith-based mantra. A meditator could also use, for example, “Jesus Christ” or “Our Lord, Jesus Christ” as a mantra (discussed in more detail in chapter 4).

I take this instruction one step further. For clients who wish to practice a faith-based form of meditation, I suggest considering incorporating a mantra of any religious element of his or her choosing into the meditation. I tell clients who want to use a faith-based mantra that, if they wish, they can test out a sacred mantra from among those commonly used in various religions and traditions (Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, n.d.).

The following are relevant examples of possible mantras that are faith-based in origin (see Schmidt, n.d.-b):

- *Marantha* (an Aramaic mantra meaning “The Lord is coming”)
- *Om Mani Pade Hum* (a Buddhist mantra meaning “The jewel in the lotus of the heart”)
- *Deus meus et Omnia* (a Christian mantra meaning “My God and my all”)
- *Om Shanti* or *Om Bhavani* (Hindu mantras in honor of the Divine Mother)
- *Allahu Akbar* (an Islamic mantra meaning “God is great”)
- *Barukh attah Adonai* (a mantra from Judaism meaning “Blessed art thou, O Lord”)
- *Shehenna* (a Native American mantra meaning “Gift of God”)

Other religion-specific words or short phrases to consider for your mantra include “God,” “Jesus,” “Jehovah,” “Father,” “My Lord and my God,” “God be with me,” “Jesus, give me strength,” “Kyrie eleison,” “Allah,” “Savior,” “Abba,” “Shalom,” “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” and

so forth. Alternatively, one can consider more “generic” faith-based mantras, such as “Life is a sacred journey,” “faith,” “serenity,” “I believe,” or “Be still.”

MANTRAM REPETITION PROGRAM

MRP is an example of a faith-based mantra form of meditation. The impact of MRP was reported in a study (Oman & Bormann, 2015), in which 132 MRP participants chose a short, sacred phrase from a spiritual tradition (for example, “Jesus,” “Barukh attah Adonai,” “Om mani padme hum”). The chosen phrase was repeated silently throughout the day to interrupt unwanted thoughts and behaviors and to improve concentration and attention. The authors concluded that MRP fosters self-efficacy for managing PTSD symptoms, favorably affecting diverse facets of well-being, and that physical health effects merited further investigation.

CENTERING PRAYER: A CHRISTIAN PRAYER USING MANTRA-BASED PRINCIPLES

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be
acceptable in your sight always, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 19:14 ((New Heart English Bible)

Meditation is a central element in centering prayer—considered by many to be a more modern (critics would say, detrimental) version of contemplative prayer that traces its lineage to the Desert Fathers (and Mothers) of Christianity around the third century A.D. (To help control distractions or obsessions as a way of “guarding the heart,” they frequently would repeat what has become known as the Jesus Prayer or Prayer of the Heart: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me (a sinner)”); DeRobien, 2018.) The modern development of centering prayer in the 1970s is commonly attributed to three Trappist monks: Fathers Thomas Keating, William Menninger, and M. Basil Pennington of St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts (see Keating, 2009, and other of his works).*

Centering prayer is derived from the Christian contemplative heritage from the time of the early Desert Fathers (and Mothers) to the book *Cloud of the Unknowing* (Johnston, 1973; by an anonymous fourteenth-century author) and St. John of the Cross.† Also, there is the important Carmelite

*Keating describes his searching to develop a contemplative life (Keating & Wilbur, 2004; Keating, 1986). See <http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org> for a complete annotated listing of Keating’s published work.

†Johnston’s translation of *Cloud of the Unknowing* is one of the more modern and more easily understood. Also, it includes *The Book of Privy*, which is not found in all translations.

tradition of contemplative prayer to include the work of St. Teresa of Avila (2011; also see Larkin, 2003) and St. Ignatius of Loyola (2015).*

In *Contemplative Prayer*, Merton (1969) described early Christian meditation: “Meditation [by the early monks] . . . consisted in making the words of the Bible their own by memorizing them and repeating them, with deep and simple concentration, ‘from the heart’”[†] (p. xxix). Therefore, the “heart” comes to play a central role in this primitive form of monastic prayer. Merton further wrote how St. Macarius described prayer from the heart: “The meditation of my heart is in your sight” (p. xxix). As mentioned earlier, St. Macarius gave one of the earliest described instructions of “prayer of the heart”: “to invoke the name of Christ, with profound attention, in the very ground of one’s being, that is to say in ‘the heart’” (p. xxix). St. Macarius concluded that “there is no other perfect meditation than the saving and blessed Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling without interruption in you” (pp. xxix, xxx).

Centering prayer places a strong emphasis on “interior silence” and getting in touch with God, who dwells within each of us, through meditation-like practice.

Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10 (New Heart English Bible)

One of my favorite scripture readings reflects the meditation emphasis on “being still, being in the present moment,” and not getting caught up in the busyness of daily life:

In the midst of their journey he (Jesus) came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord’s feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do all the serving by myself? Please tell her to help me.”

But the Lord answered, “Martha, Martha,” he said. “You worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.” (Luke 10:38–42 [New Jerusalem Bible])

*The 2015 Loyola Press edition is one of many published versions of St. Ignatius’s spiritual exercises and meditations on scripture passages, prayers, imaginative mental exercises, and contemplative exercises.

[†]Permission to reprint all excerpts from *Contemplative Prayer* granted by Merton Legacy Trust.

One lesson gleaned from this scripture is that Jesus's response was that it was better "to just be" rather than "to just be busy." Be still, and you will be in a receptive mode, able to hear what Jesus has to say. Is not "to just be" what we are able to do when we fully engaged in meditating—or in praying?

The instructions for centering prayer essentially are the same as commonly given instructions for mantra-based meditation. This similarity between centering prayer and Hindu-based mantra meditation, by the way, is a primary source of contention among some Christians who have concerns about centering prayer. The only substantial difference that I perceive between mantra forms of meditation and centering prayer is that in centering prayer, the mantra is restricted to a Christian religion-based word or words.

Instruction for centering prayer is as follows (Dwyer, n.d.; Weiss, 2008):

- Choose a sacred word that is the focus of your intention to allow God to be present within you; this can include a word or words such as "Jesus," "Jesus Christ," "Abba," "Jehovah," "Our Father," "Jesus, My Lord and Savior." (I also have had clients use "Jesus Christ, heal me, help me, free me" and "Help me, Jesus.")
- Sit in any position that is comfortable, eyes closed, and briefly "settle" or calm yourself.
- In silence, begin repeating the sacred word or words; these represent your consent to welcome God's presence and action within yourself.
- When distracted by thoughts, simply and gently return to focus on the sacred word(s).
- When finished with a contemplative prayer session, simply stay sitting with your eyes closed for a few minutes longer and remain silent.

Merton's (1969) description elaborates on the simplicity and focus of centering prayer:

We will only emphasize the essential simplicity of monastic prayer in the primitive "prayer of the heart" which consisted in interior recollection, the abandonment of distracting thoughts and the humble invocation of the Lord Jesus with words from the Bible in a spirit of intense faith. . . . The practice of keeping the name of Jesus ever present in the ground of one's being was, for the ancient monks, the secret of the "control of thoughts," and of victory over temptation. (pp. xxx–xxxii)

Merton (1958) further described the Christian purpose of contemplative prayer as not praying "for the sake of praying." Rather, we pray "for the sake of being heard." "We do not pray in order to listen to ourselves praying

but in order that God may hear us and answer us” (p. 104). And so, while the emphasis is on receiving (as it is in various forms of meditation), Merton concludes that our praying is not directed to receiving *any* answer, but that it is God’s answer we seek.

Furthermore, Merton (1958) wrote that the attitude necessary in contemplative prayer to receive God’s answer is to realize that all that we are seeking in such prayer is God. Seeking God’s answer can be successful only when we come to a profound realization—“that we cannot find Him unless He shows Himself to us, and yet at the same time that He would not have inspired us to seek Him unless we had already found Him” (p. 53). (The phrasing of Merton’s last sentence has similarities to a Zen koan, in which contemplating on a seemingly paradoxical statement is used as a form of meditation discipline.)

“Christian meditation” is another term used for faith-based meditation practice, such as that under the leadership of Laurence Freeman (World Community for Christian Meditation, wccm.org), carrying on the work of John Main (Freeman, 2014). (For a discussion of Protestant Christian meditation, see chapter 4.)

RELEVANCE FOR FAITH-BASED FORMS OF MEDITATION

As mentioned previously, I am not aware of any forms of meditation that involve “an erasure or blocking out of all thoughts.” For example, the TM instruction is to be less attached to thoughts to better focus on the mantra. And yes, with practice and repetition, this can lead to increasing moments of silence in between ever-present thoughts and repetition of the mantra.

Furthermore, I have found that often during meditation I have a dual or simultaneous focus on both my ever-insistent array of thoughts (and other distractions) *and* my mantra. Thus, in my view, because meditation is not intended to blank out the mind, it will not blank out messages that God tries to communicate while a person is meditating. Rather, the meditator should have a dual awareness—of potential communications from God and of the repetition of the mantra. If one’s mantra is Christocentric, the meditation *per se* is indeed Christocentric and the emphasis is on connecting with God.

Merton (1969) articulates the aim of “prayer of the heart” meditation in which “Jesus” is repeated as the mantra:

Meditation or “prayer of the heart” is the active effort we make to keep our hearts open so that we may be enlightened by him and filled with this realization of or true relation to him. Therefore, the classic form of “meditation” is repetitive invocation of the name of Jesus in the

heart, emptied of images and cares. Hence the aim of meditation, in the context of Christian faith, is not to arrive at an objective and apparently “scientific” knowledge about God, but to come to know him through the realization that our very being is penetrated with his knowledge and love for us. (p. 61)

Remember Merton’s (1969) quote of St. Macarius: “There is no other perfect meditation than the saving and blessed Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling without interruption in you” (pp. xxix–xxx).

VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE THE IMPACT OF ALL MANTRAS

In addition to any meaning that might be inherent in or ascribed to the mantra (in faith-based or secular meditation, respectively), additional variables influence the impact of the mantra’s repetition. When my clients are beginning to meditate with a mantra, I suggest that they experiment in the following ways:

- Silently think or repeat your mantra versus saying, chanting, or singing your mantra out loud. See if you have a preference between silently thinking the mantra and saying it out loud. Saying and hearing the sound of the mantra might amplify its effect.
- Vary the speed at which the mantra is repeated.
- Vary the number of seconds for which a syllable or word is held.
- Vary the length of the pause between each repetition of the mantra.
- Vary which word or words are emphasized when the mantra is more than one word in length.
- Vary how loudly or softly you think or say the mantra (yes, we can think softer or louder).
- Vary the location in which one meditates—in isolation versus in public.
- Meditate by oneself and with a group of meditators (also experiment with having the same or a different meditation focus from others in the group).
- Listen to and absorb your mantra being recited on a video or recording.

Simply scanning or reading about variables that influence a mantra’s impact has extremely limited efficacy. This does not provide you with an experiential appreciation of the impact of implementing any such variables on your repetition of a mantra. Indeed, it is only meaningful and helpful if

you test out the impact by variably reciting your mantra, silently or out loud. And this is what I do in introducing clients to meditation.

MANTRA MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN

Forms of mantra-based meditation have been described as particularly useful with children. For example, the Daily Meditation Web site describes how the three words of the title track to the immensely popular animated film, *Frozen*, “Let it go,” are perfect for teaching children to let go of their thoughts and feelings and to live in the moment (Daily Meditation, 2013). (See also Beach, n.d.; Khalsa, n.d.)

CONCENTRATIVE MEDITATIONS: CLOSING THOUGHTS

From my 40-plus years of experience with mantra meditation, I am struck by how flexible concentrative (or “shutting down”) forms of meditation are. Mantra-based forms of meditation seem particularly suited to being practiced either as a form of faith-based meditation or as a form of secular meditation. TM, in terms of sheer numbers of those meditating in the West, has been by far the most popular form of mantra meditation for several decades. Furthermore, as will be illustrated in later chapters, mantra meditation is not limited to traditional meditation that is sitting down, legs crossed, eyes closed, and in a quiet room.

In closing, I am hopeful that this brief discussion of concentrative meditation, secular and faith-based meditation, and alternative approaches to mantra forms in particular has been informative. And I am curious as to how representative my own personal meditation practice might be. I have developed a regular practice that includes three forms of meditation: a secular, TM-based mantra meditation (*shirim*), a faith-based mantra meditation (the Latin pronunciation of “Jesus”), and the “spot” usage of both my TM mantra and 7/11 breath-based meditation, which is discussed in the following chapter.

As the air moves in and out of me I can feel it
 I'm the Buddha, the mother Mary, and holy spirit.
 It's every book I read, the single thread that gets me clear and out
 of my head
 Ties my body to my soul and I'm always near it.

Bob Sima (2014)