

# A Portable Spiritual Intervention for Health and Wellbeing: *Mantram Repetition*

Presented by  
Chaplain Mirabai Galashan MTh.

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## Acknowledgements

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Research funding:  
VA HSR&D, Nursing Research Initiative (04-041)  
National Center for Complementary & Alternative Medicine/NIH



This material represents the work of the authors and the content does not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.

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## Objectives

1. Describe and define distinctions between mantram and mantra.
2. Outline the origins of the Mantram Program and its application in a variety of patients and healthcare providers.
3. Summarize research evidence that supports the health-related benefits of the Mantram Repetition Program.

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## Assumptions



1. We have a mind, body and spirit with inner spiritual resources.
2. We are unaware of our inner calm *because* of inability to quiet our minds.
3. Training attention using a mantram quiets the mind to tap inner spiritual resources.

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## What is a Mantram?

### Why not "mantra"?

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## Mantram =

Sanskrit root word "mantra"

manas = "mind"

tra = "to set free from"

"to set free from the mind"

"a thought that liberates and protects" (Radha, 1996)

a *sacred or holy* word or phrase

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1. Secularized usage of the word "mantra"



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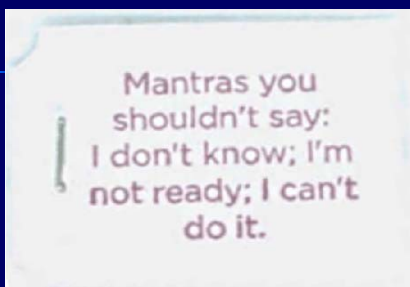
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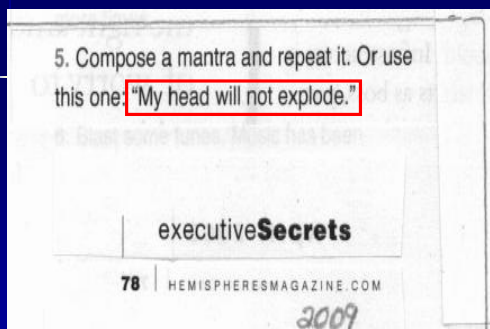
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# Mantram Examples

Rama	Om Mani Padme Hum
My God and my all	O Wakan Tanka
One	Shalom or Om Shanti
Ribono shel olam	So Hum

## "Faith Factor" (Benson, 2006)

Not necessary to identify as "religious" or "spiritual" to benefit, but people with beliefs tend to practice & benefit more.

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2. Reflects work of Eknath Easwaran, spiritual teacher of passage meditation & the Eight Point Program—



The Blue Mountain  
Center of Meditation  
Tomales, CA  
[www.easwaran.org](http://www.easwaran.org)

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3. Different than *Transcendental Meditation* (TM)

TM teaches one to "transcend" thought by sitting 20 minutes twice per day.



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Mantram repetition raises awareness of one's thoughts to help gain control of them.

*Mantram Repetition* is not a sitting meditation.

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## Ancient Universal Practice

- 600 BC Upanishads
- 400 BC Mercabilism
- Judaism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Greek Byzantine
- Islam
- Shamanism
- Buddhism

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## Origins

Ekhnath Easwaran

1. *Passage Meditation*
2. *Mantram Repetition*
3. *Slowing Down*
4. *One-Pointed Attention*
5. Sense Training
6. Putting Others First
7. Spiritual Reading
8. Spiritual Fellowship

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## Problem?

Few maintained sitting meditation despite it helping them . . .

BUT, nearly *all* stated:

*"I still use my mantram" ...*

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## 8 Point Program

Sri Eknath Easwaran

1. Passage Meditation
2. **Mantram Repetition**
3. **Slowing Down**
4. **One-Pointed Attention**
5. Sense Training
6. Putting Others First
7. Spiritual Reading
8. Spiritual Fellowship

Mantram  
Intervention

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## Training Attention

*"Portable Stress Buster"*

1. Mantram Repetition
2. Slowing Down
3. One-Pointed Attention

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## Mantram Repetition Helps Train Attention

Quiets the mind, allows access to  
inner spiritual resources of calm, peace, joy

Like a mental "pause button"

"When neurons fire together, they wire  
together." Hebb's Law

Neuroplasticity - restructuring the brain

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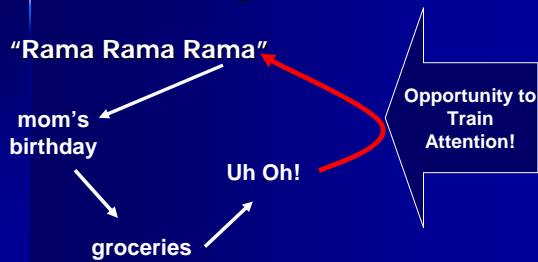
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## Example of Training Attention



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## Portable Practice

1. Practice repeating to train attention
2. Practice when you "don't need it"
  - waiting in lines
  - at a stoplight
  - before sleeping at night, when relaxed
3. Use it when you "do need it"
  - Interrupt/redirect obsessive thoughts
  - Slow reactivity to disturbing events

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## Phases of Practice

1. Mind-Body Conditioning
2. Experiential Awareness
3. Habitual



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## How to Choose a Mantram

- Choose a traditional mantram.
- Don't make up your own.
- Take your time, then don't change it.
- Let a mantram choose you.
- If you have difficulty, try "Rama" or "One"
- You need not be religious or spiritual.
- You need not understand the meaning to have an effect.

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## How to Use a Mantram

1. Choose a mantram word or phrase
2. Repeat it silently
3. Passively ignore other thoughts
4. Repeat as often as possible throughout the day
5. Use it when you need to.
6. Use it when you don't!

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## Mantram at VA

- 8 sessions, 1 per week  
60 – 90 minutes per session  
Monthly "refreshers"  
2 facilitators who
- practice themselves
  - clinical experience with veterans
  - teaching/group experience

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# Mantram Curriculum

- **What is a mantram**
- **How to choose and use a mantram**
- Tracking mantram practice
- Mantram repetition and the stress response
- Slowing down
- One-pointed attention
- Putting it all together
- Making mantram a part of your life

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## Course Materials



*Strength for the Storm* (2005). Easwaran

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## Class Structure

- Sit in circle
- Cover group "guidelines"
- White board or flip chart
- Name tags
- Books
- Manuals
- Instructor Guide



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# Tracking Mantram Practice

Mantram Sessions  
per Day



	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Daily	7	5	2	0	6	3	1
Night	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

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# Questions?



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# Growing Research Evidence

## VA Hospitals Now Tending to Spiritual Health

Effects of Spiritual Mantram Repetition on HIV Outcomes:  
A Randomized Controlled Trial

Jill E. Bormann,<sup>1,2\*</sup> Allen L. Gifford,<sup>3</sup> Martha Shively,<sup>1,3</sup> Tom L. Smith,<sup>1,4</sup>  
Laura Redwine,<sup>5</sup> Ann Kelly,<sup>6</sup> Sheryl Becker,<sup>7</sup> Madeline Gerchovis,<sup>1,4</sup>  
Patricia Bone,<sup>8</sup> and Wendy Belding<sup>9</sup>

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0140000

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Frequent, Silent Mantram  
Repetition  
A Jacuzzi for the Mind

Jill E. Bormann, PhD, RN

CHAPTER 7

Mantram or Holy Name Repetition:  
Health Benefits from a Portable  
Spiritual Practice

JILL E. BORMANN AND DOUG OMAN

SPirit,  
SCIENCE,  
and  
HEALTH

HOW THE SPIRITUAL MIND FUELS PHYSICAL WELLNESS

Edited by Thomas D. Horne and Carl E. Thornton

Foreword by Robert Kiehl

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## Who's Been Taught?

- Veterans with chronic illness
- Health care employees
- Family caregivers of vets with demen
- Persons with HIV/AIDS (randomized trial)
- Veterans with military PTSD
- Teleconference delivery
  - caregivers
  - Iraq veterans

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## Supporting Studies

Sample	Outcomes	
Veterans with chronic illness <sup>#</sup>	Stress ↓	Quality of Life, ↑
Healthcare workers <sup>#</sup>	Anxiety ↓	Spiritual ↑
	Anger ↓	Well-Being ↑

<sup>#</sup>Bormann & Oman (2007). Mantram or Holy Name Repetition in T.G. Plante & C. Thoresen's (Eds.) *Spirit, Science & Health* (pp. 94-112). London: Praeger.

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## Supporting Studies

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	Anger ↓	Well-Being ↑
Healthy Adults <sup>#</sup>	Stress ↓	"Sattva" ↑
	Depression ↓	Satisfaction ↑
	Inertia ↓	with life ↑
HIV+ Adults <sup>#</sup>	Anger ↓	Faith ↑
		Connectedness ↑
		Cortisol ↓

<sup>#</sup>Wolf & Abell (2003). Examining the effects of meditation techniques on psychosocial functioning. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 13(1), 27-42.

<sup>#</sup>Bormann & Oman (2007). Mantram or Holy Name Repetition in T.G. Plante & C. Thoresen's (Eds.) *Spirit, Science & Health* (pp. 94-112). London: Praeger.

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# Can mantram help to manage symptoms of PTSD?



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## Sample Characteristics

136 outpatient veterans with PTSD  
Not actively abusing drugs  
No psychotic or personality disorders  
Not actively suicidal

Randomly assigned to groups  
6 week mantram + usual care vs. usual care

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## Group Descriptions

Treatment	Control
Case Management plus Mantram	Case Management
Medication + Provider Visits M = 5 (SD=4)	Medication + Provider Visits M = 4 (SD=4)
6 (90/min) weekly meetings Mantram Slowing One-Pointedness	

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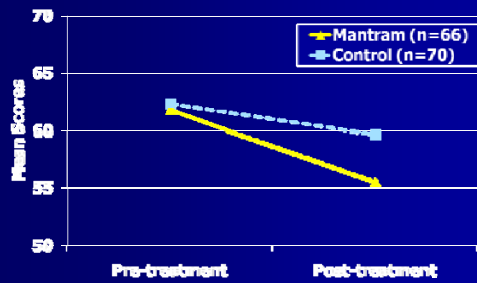
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## PTSD Checklist Scores

$t(109) = 2.29, p < .03, d = .34$



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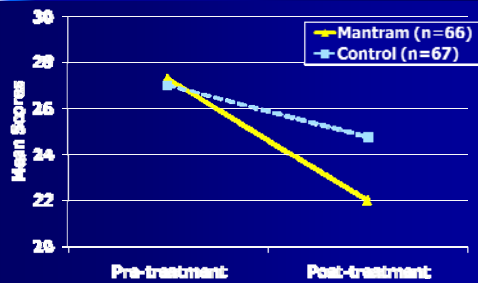
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## Clinician Admin PTSD Scale Hyper-arousal

$t(127) = 2.57, p = .011, d = .54$



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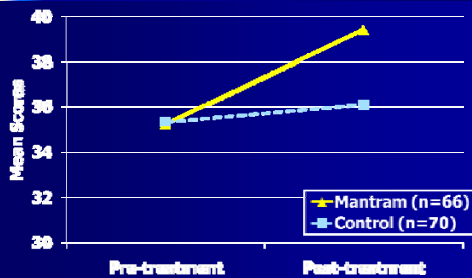
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## Quality of Life Enjoyment & Satisfaction: SF (14-70)

$t(134) = -3.05, p = .003, d = .37$



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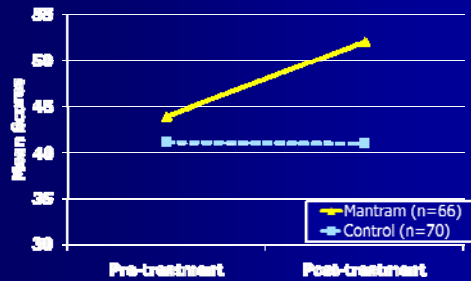
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## Spiritual Well-Being

FACIT-SpEx.v4  
 $t(132) = -4.82, p = .0001, d = .49$




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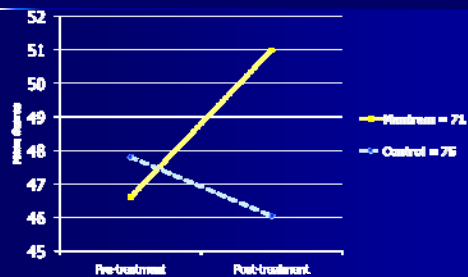
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## Mindfulness

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale  
 $F(1,134) = 9.91, p = .002, \eta^2 = .07$




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## Veterans with PTSD

"The mantram has been helping; the memories don't come as often. I feel more comfortable."

"Instead of cursing or saying something stupid, you've got the mantram to fall back on."

"Makes you feel better about yourself because you have more control."

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## To Manage Anger

"Well, once in awhile, I get involved with my wife of 40 years and I lose my temper. And I right away can get the mantram to help me out of that situation and it blends things real well; and I have a little trouble with my voice control because of a stroke that I had and the mantram helps me get over that."

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## To Manage PTSD Sx

"Any time I get agitated. Any time I have any PTSD triggers . . . driving. . . situations in relationships . . . anywhere I feel uncomfortable. Those types of things . . . in crowds when I am not comfortable in crowds . . . If I wake up in the night from a dream or nightmare . . . I wake up in sweat . . . I say my mantram and I relax."

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## Nurses' Quotes

"Well, lots of times when I am working, you know, I'm working and something happens around the area and I get stressed about it, and I want to do something about it. . . So I just do some of my mantrams, just to take my mind out of it (stress). It works."

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"I use the mantram at work, too, because understandably in case management you get into a lot of situations where families are frustrated and oftentimes, you are the closet thing; and they just sometimes take things out on you. There's nothing you can do about the thing, but if you say your mantram and just deal with them in a calm way, it's amazing that when you're calm, they usually calm down."

Richards, Oman, Hedberg, et al (2006). Nursing Science Quarterly

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## Not a cure-all

From a Veteran with PTSD:

"It [mantram] doesn't always work all the time, though. But most of the time it will work, you know, in other words, it's taken away a lot of that mental anguish that I usually carry."

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## Practical Application

### 2 Common Causes of Stress

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## *Too much to do!*



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## *Too little time!*



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## Vanishing Pause

*slow*

*fast*

Buttons	→	Zipper	→	Velcro
Stove	→	Pressure cooker	→	Microwave
Washboard	→	Wringer washer	→	Washer-dryer
Abacus	→	Adding machine	→	Calculator
Operator	→	Telephone	→	Cellphone
Pony Express	→	Fed Ex	→	Fax or E-mail
Pen	→	Typewriter	→	Computer
Desktop	→	Laptop	→	Smartphone

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# Time Pressure

## ■ Associated with

- Feelings of impatience
- Hostility & aggressiveness
- Competition & hurry

## ■ Long-term risk of hypertension

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# Stress in Workplace

## Time Pressure Multi-tasking

The average employee ~

- *switches tasks every 3 minutes*
- *is interrupted every 2 minutes*
- *has maximum focus for 12 minutes*

Gloria Mark, PhD, UC Irvine

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## Who has time for stress management techniques?

Progressive muscle relaxation

Aerobic exercise or strength training

Yoga, Tai Chi, Qi-Gong or similar

Visual imagery

Listen to music

Be in nature, gardening

Biofeedback

Meditation (any kind)

Practice EVERY day!

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## One-Pointed Attention

Bring full attention to mantram repetition  
Bring full attention to any task at hand  
Bring full attention when listening to others

- Experiments: Choose task, set timer 30 minutes, stick with it, notice distractions, procrastinations, self-talk, share in class

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## Practice Mantram in *Non-Stressful* Moments

Repeat Mantram when relaxed or experiencing something pleasant.

This creates a mind-body connection.

Mantram —————> Sleep  
Mantram —————> Hot shower  
Mantram —————> Sunset

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## Then, Use Mantram When Stressed

During stressful times, repeat mantram to re-focus attention and "pause" to gain perspective.

*Fear* - - - - -> Mantram —————> Sleep  
*Ruminating* - -> Mantram —————> Hot shower  
*Pain* - - - - -> Mantram —————> Sunset

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## What makes it portable?

- ✓ Invisible
- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✓ Immediately available
- ✓ Can be used at anytime, anyplace, even during some activities
- ✓ Complementary/non-pharmacological
- ✓ Simple to learn
- ✓ Non-toxic

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## Thank You!

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"A fast mind is sick.  
A slow mind is sound.  
A still mind is divine."  
Meher Baba

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