

A Brief Glimpse at Mantras

Various types of *mantras* are employed in deity worship during different stages of the worship. According to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī these *mantras* are all *nāmātmaka-mantras*: They all have their basis in the holy name of the Lord. Ultimately the holy name suffices for all purposes. But to assist us in coming to the platform of pure chanting of the holy name, *nāmātmaka-mantras* are utilized within the process of deity worship.

The following are the basic types of *mantras* used in deity worship:

- 1) *Dhyāna-mantras* (meditation mantras) are used to invoke the form, activities, associates and *dhāma* of the Lord in one's mind.
- 2) *Bīja-mantras* (seed mantras) are used for purification of articles and for meditation.
- 3) *Mūla-mantras* (root *mantras*), being the essence of the deity, are recited along with the offering of each article of worship, as a means of addressing the Lord.
- 4) *Stutis* and *stotras* (prayers and glorification) are chanted at the end of worship to glorify the name, form, qualities and pastimes of the Lord.
- 5) *Praṇāma-mantras* are used to offer obeisances to the Lord at the end of worship.
- 6) *Gāyatrī mantras* are used to worship the Lord, evoking consciousness of the three principles *sambandha*, *abhidheya* and *prayojana*.

Mantras Given by the Spiritual Master (guru-datta-mantra)

The potency of a *mantra* is manifested when it is heard from the lips of a spiritual master coming in the bona fide disciplic succession. At the time of *pañcarātri* initiation the spiritual master gives the disciple *mantras* that are authorized by the *pañcarātri* scriptures and have been passed down through the disciplic succession. The *Padma Purāṇa* states that mantras that do not come through the tradition of spiritual masters will not bring the desired result.

One must receive all kinds of *mantras* from a bona-fide spiritual master, otherwise the *mantras* will not be fruitful. [SB. 6.8.42, purport]

These *mantras* given by the spiritual master, being revealed through scripture, are non-different from the deity. The disciple does not reveal the *mantras* given by the spiritual master to anyone.

The subjects or *devatās* of the *mantras* given by the spiritual master are the principal worshipable Deities of the *sampradāya*. These mantras are used when the disciple worships the deities according to the *pañcarātri-vidhi*.¹

Bīja Syllables and Mūla Mantras

One significant characteristic of *pañcarātri*ka worship is the use of *bīja* syllables to denote specific potencies and Deities. *Nārada Pañcarātra* explains that the *bīja* syllables are primordial sound fragments which have the power to evoke a particular energy both within and outside the person who utters the *bīja*. The sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet are a reflection of a spiritual counterpart which is vibrating in a dormant state within the Māyā-bound living entity. Each sound of the alphabet has a particular quality of energy. The simplest sounds combine to form *bījas* which have more particular qualities and are qualitatively equal to specific spiritual deities. Some principle *bījas* are as follows: *Om* is the *sat-bīja*, invoking the potency of eternality. *Aim*, *hrīm* and *śrīm* evoke the *cit*, or knowledge, potency in its various aspects. *Klīm* evokes *ānanda*, or bliss; it fulfills all desires and is thus called *kāma-bīja*.

Bījas and combinations of *bījas* either alone or in combination with the names of deities' form *mūla-mantras*, or sound representations of deities. These *mūla-mantras*, being non-different from the Deities worshiped, are chanted during meditation to fix the mind on Them; *mūla-mantras* are also used to purify articles such that they may be used in service to Lord, to bring the Lord to a prepared seat, and to offer articles of worship (*upacāras*) for the Lord's service.

Mūla Mantras and Upacāra Names

Mūla-mantras should be chanted only by devotees duly initiated by a bona fide spiritual master into the chanting of *pañcarātri*ka Gāyatrī *mantras*.

All the *mūla-mantras* for *viṣṇu-tattva* Deities may use the *bīja* syllable *klīm*, since these deities are expansions of Kṛṣṇa. If you are worshiping a deity who is not a *viṣṇu-mūrti* and who has no specific *mūla-mantra*, simply chant *om*, the name of the deity in the dative case, and then *namaḥ*. For example, the *mūla-mantra* for the cowherd boy Subala would be *om subalāya namaḥ*. Alternatively, take the first syllable of the personality's name and add *anusvāra* to form the *bīja*. Example: *praṁ prahlādāya namaḥ*.

When offering articles of worship or performing services, say the name of the article or service and then the *mūla-mantra* of the deity you are worshiping. This shows respect and draws the Lord's attention to the article being offered or the service being rendered.

In the Bengali Gauḍīya system of worship, the name of the *upacāra* in singular number is preceded by the Sanskrit word meaning "this," which changes form according to the gender of the *upacāra* word: *etat* or *idam* for neuter words (*etat padyam*, *idam ācamanīyam*); *eṣa* for masculine words (*eṣa gandha*, *eṣa dīpaḥ*); and *eṣā* for feminine words (*eṣā gaṅgā-mṛttikā*). If the article is plural in number, it is preceded by *etāni* for neuter items (*etāni puṣpāni*), *ete* for masculine items, and *etā* for feminine items. If the article is dual in number, it is preceded by *ete* if the articles are neuter or feminine (*ete gandha-puṣpe*), and by *etau* if the articles are masculine.

Gāyatrī Mantras

The ancient Vedic tradition prescribes the chanting of the *mantra* beginning ‘*om bhūr bhūvaḥ svāḥ*’ (*brahma-gāyatrī*) or *gāyatrī-japa* (also called *sandhya-vandana*) as one of the principle *sādhana*s for the upper *varṇa*s. With the introduction of *pañcarātri*ka *sādhana*, *Gāyatrī mantras* for meditation on specific deities were also introduced. We chant both the *brahma-gāyatrī* and the *pañcarātri*ka *Gāyatrī mantras* (as well as the *guru*-given *mūla-mantras*) ten times each in the morning, noon and evening.

In the *Gāyatrī mantras* used in *pañcarātri*ka worship, there are three stages of meditation: *sambandha* (relationship), by acknowledgement (*vid*) of the Lord; *abhidheya* (process), or worship (*dhī*) of the Lord by which one can develop *prema*; and *prayojana* (result), or *prema*, which impells the devotee (*pracodayāt*) spontaneously to the Lord. The appropriate *Gāyatrī* for a particular deity is chanted as *japa*, along with the deity’s *mūla-mantra*, at the end of the worship.

Being spiritual sound, *mūla-mantras* and *Gāyatrī mantras* are extremely potent when uttered by an advanced, realized devotee. For one who is practicing for realization, if he utters the *mantras* under the guidance of a realized soul with faith and purity (without offense) the full potency will be awakened within himself. Chanting the *mūla-mantras* and *Gāyatrīs* leads to realization of the transcendental form of the deity.

¹ Following in the footsteps of his spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda has given *pañcarātri*ka initiation with *mūla-mantras* and *Gāyatrī mantras* for worshiping the spiritual master, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. For the worship of other deities, such as Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu and Śrī Rāmacandra, other *mūla-mantras* may be used, as given in Volume 1, after receiving them (hearing them) from one’s own spiritual master or his authorized representative. The *Gāyatrī mantras* given by Śrīla Prabhupāda may be used for the worship of all deities, e.g., for Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu (or other associates of Lord Caitanya) the devotee may chant the *Gaura-gāyatrī mantra*, thinking of the particular deity as an expansion of Lord Caitanya; for Śrī Rāmacandra or Śrī Nṛsiṃhadeva the devotee may chant *Kāma-gāyatrī mantra*, thinking of the particular deity as an expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa.