

# Meditation and the Power of the Group

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**BY CHARLES SHAHAR**

**T**HE GROUP SETTING provides a supportive influence for meditation. A meditation center, particularly a place where people live and unfold their spiritual work together, will have a powerful energy that accumulates over time. You can feel it immediately when you walk inside. There is a kind of ethereal or rarified quality to the atmosphere. Tranquility pervades the mind-field there. The people who live in this center may not notice it, since they have become habituated to its influence.

I generally choose to live in proximity to the meditation center that I frequent. Aside from practical considerations of transportation, I find that the center transmits supportive energies to those who are linked to it. I can often feel these



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protective vibrations. The link among a group of meditators is very strong.

Even people who don't meditate, but live in the same block or neighborhood, benefit from a spiritual center in their midst. They may not know it, but the center will raise the vibrations of the area around it. If the center closes, there is a feeling of emptiness or loss. Again, this may be picked up only subconsciously by those who are not sensitive to subtle vibrations.

Group meditations are generally powerful. Those who first come to group meditations will often go through a period of adjustment before settling into the space. It takes time for their nervous system to get used to the high level of energy. If someone is tired or feeling sad, they will likely walk away from the group session feeling energized. The group has enough momentum to lift its individual members.

As the group rises together there is a powerful transcendence which takes place for the meditator. It is difficult to describe this experience, and the rational mind struggles to find appropriate words. We can say that the mind is transcended, and the individual sense of identity dissolves. This is a state that is beyond space and time, and which leads us back to our source: Infinite Consciousness.

Of course, one can meditate on his or her own and achieve such a state of beatitude. But I find that the group energy facilitates this process. In a group setting, sometimes all meditators need to do is close their eyes, and their soul will fly. The group energy is so powerful that the effect can be immediate. A busy mind or intrusive emotions simply fade away.

Meditation is not the only activity suitable during a group session. There can be chanting and speaking as well. Even a recording of some profound teaching, or a reading of scriptures can enhance the group experience. All of these activities provide the mind with different opportunities to connect to a higher thought. Words of wisdom can lift the attention to another plane.



## Group Chanting

CHANTING IS A WONDERFUL prelude to meditation. People who are normally shy or reserved in other ways can express themselves through chanting, and it can thus offer a wonderful release. There is often a sense of surrender and devotion when one chants. It is not a weepy kind of sentimentalism that is created from romantic songs, but rather a connection or link to the Divine. Through chanting we romance the Lord.

# Chanting is a wonderful prelude to meditation. People who are normally shy or reserved in other ways can express themselves through chanting, and it can thus offer a wonderful release.

The effects of chanting on an atmosphere are remarkable. When many people chant, the energy they create reverberates throughout the room. It is as if the entire space is lifted off the ground. In my meditation group, we call it a “blasted” space. It is not only the atmosphere that changes, but the consciousness of the group opens to a higher dimension of reality.

There are different types of spiritual chanting. Although all raise the *kundalini* in some way, they have different ways of triggering this energy. Some chants are very dynamic and powerful. These chants often have a refrain that is repetitive, and the chants generally increase in intensity as they progress. As the pitch begins to build, the *kundalini* climbs progressively higher. If a meditation is provided for afterwards, the experience can be extremely powerful.

The silence experienced after group chanting is very full and deep. The vibrations of the songs have carried the mind into the higher planes, and the soul-being is wrapped in a sense of bliss and serenity. It is an art to know when to stop chanting and begin to meditate. There is a point when the energy reaches a peak.

Softer and gentler types of chants are great for easing the mind into meditation, or for maintaining the space at a certain level between meditations. Some chants have an exceptionally devotional quality. They also have to be sung from an attitude of surrender. Those leading a chant must be free of ego; not interested in making impressions or concerned with the “performance” of the moment. Rather they should connect with the essence, not the form, of the song.

A person who is tuned into the space will chant in neither a harsh nor disturbing way. They will not be self-conscious or bothered by doubts, because these too relate to identification with ego. It does not matter if you have a good voice or not. With practice, the throat chakra will open, and the voice will become

more refined. Some people are exceptional singers of popular songs, but their attempts at spiritual chanting may at first sound out-of-place. There is a certain quality of awareness that is conveyed through a voice. If you are in ego-consciousness, your voice will reflect it.

If your state is pure, your voice can send others into amazing states of reverie, even if you sing out of key. I have listened to spiritually aware chanters while meditating. Their voices do not come from their throat, but from a deeper source. It is the *kundalini* that carries the sounds. Imagine the power behind such singing. The sounds resonate with frequencies that transcend physical nature and transport the mind far beyond the worldly sphere.

Are there instruments that combine well with spiritual chanting? Indian instruments such as the sitar and *ektar* have a remarkably spacey quality and are excellent for enhancing the meditative aspect of the music. The most meditative instrument I have encountered is the simple *dotar*, a two-stringed instrument. It seems to blend particularly well with certain mantras or repetitive chants. It is sometimes difficult to separate the sounds of a person chanting mantra and the *dotar* itself.

Western instruments such as the harp, harmonium and dulcimer also have a meditative quality. Drums can help ground the music, but they are also great for stirring the *kundalini* fire. Likewise, rattles and chimes give texture to the music. Even an instrument such as the guitar blends well with chanting. The flute has a very ethereal sound and will also get the mind soaring.

The special connection that meditators have in a group setting transcends personalities, attitudes or backgrounds. It is a Oneness they share, not between individuals but of Infinite Consciousness. 🌸

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