



## Can I change my mantra?

by Kim Nataraja

In Christianity praying by repeating a set phrase or phrases has been a very well - established practice throughout the ages, just think of the 'Our Father', the 'Hail Mary', 'Glory be', and the 'Jesus Prayer' in the Orthodox tradition. Cassian who collected all the teaching from the 4th century Desert Fathers and Mothers recommended the phrase from the Psalms: 'O God, come to my aid; O Lord make haste to help me'. St Francis was overheard by his first follower praying by repeating all night 'Deus meus et omnia' (My God and my all). St Augustine is reputed to have used the phrase 'Noverim me, noverim te' ( May I know myself, so that I may know you). The 20th century French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil used to recite the 'Our Father' in Greek. Other mantras that have been suggested are the Aramaic word for Father 'Abba', 'Peace', Kyrie Eleison and Veni Sancte Spiritus - in fact any other phrases of spiritual significance for a Christian.

In choosing a mantra, however, it is best to follow the advice of your teacher. John Main preferred using 'Maranatha' as a mantra. He recommended this for three reasons: firstly because it was a prayer in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, meaning 'Come, Lord' or 'The Lord comes'; secondly because it is, apart from the 'Our Father', the oldest known Christian prayer. (St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is written in Greek, yet he finishes it with the Aramaic 'maranatha', which shows how well known this prayer was to the early Christians.) And thirdly it has the advantage that it has no associations for us, so it won't lead us into thought that easily.

The main reason for using a prayer, a mantra, is to clear the mind of any other thoughts and focus it lovingly and one-pointedly on the Divine. We start by saying the mantra mentally, then after a while we become aware that we are listening to it, and over time we move completely from the mind to the heart and the mantra sounds itself in the centre of our being. This natural process would not take place if we changed our mantra constantly.

Laurence Freeman described the effect of the mantra in the following words:

"Some time ago, I was at a concert. As we waited for the concert to begin, I listened to the orchestra beginning to tune up. It was about the most discordant sound I've ever heard. Each instrument was playing its own way, in total disharmony. Then what happened was that the oboe, a quiet, little instrument, began to play and all the other instruments tuned in on its note. And gradually, the entire disharmony began to calm down. Then there was silence, and the concert began. It seems to me that the mantra is very much like that little oboe. In meditation, the mantra brings all the parts of our being, one by one, bit by bit, into harmony. And when we are in harmony, we are the music of God."

It is therefore very important that we stay with the same mantra, so that it can root itself in our being and have this harmonizing effect.