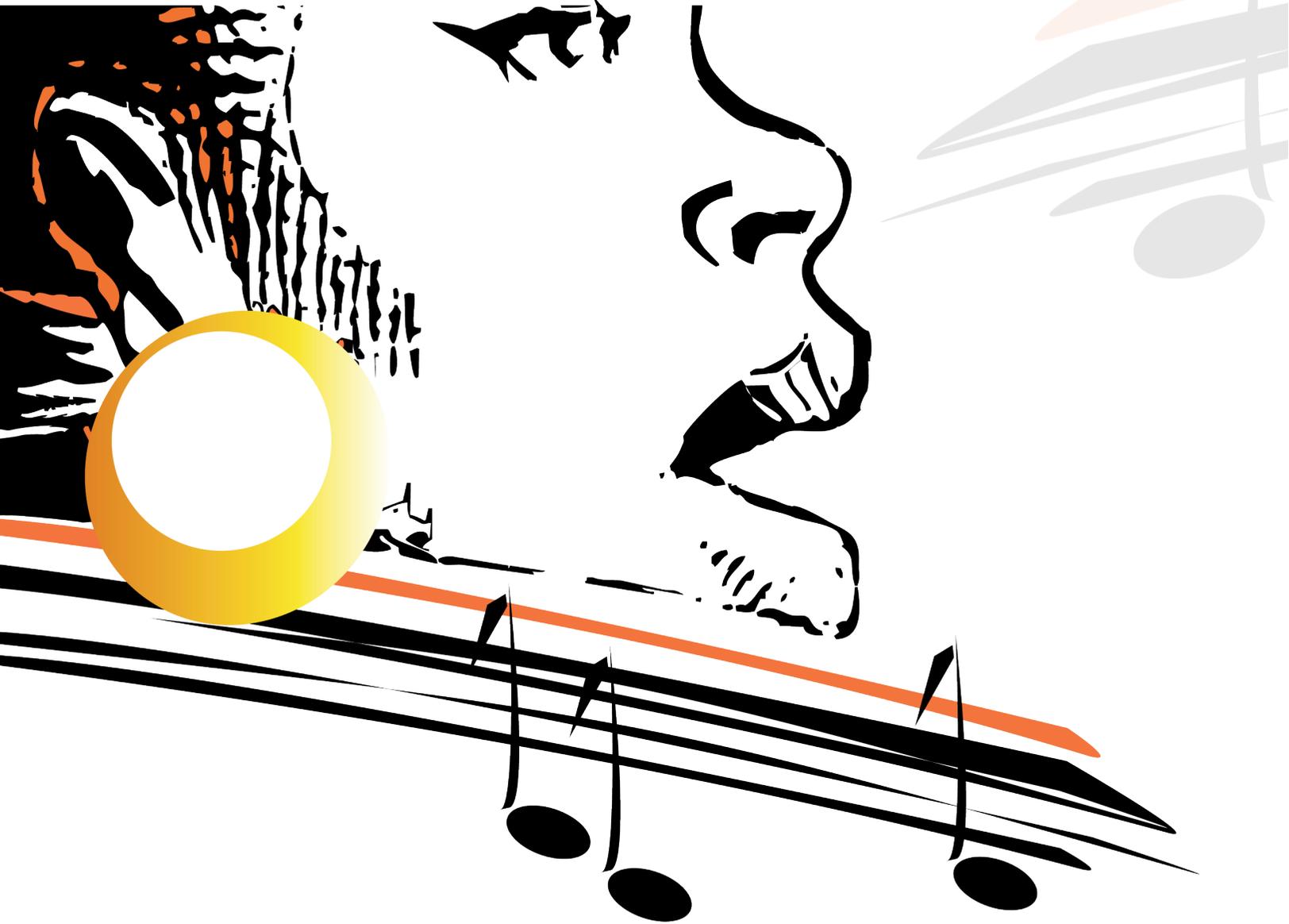


Good vibrations

How the yoga of voice stretches the mind, body and spirit in all directions.

By Katie Rose



Most yoga classes involve at least one closing or opening chant. More and more yogis and yoginis are now attending Kirtan (chanting sessions) and integrating chanting into their daily practice. This magazine itself carries the name of the master mantra: Om. In ancient Sanskrit texts, Om is the vibration found at the beginning of all creation, a truly Big Bang.

Everything is composed of vibrations of different frequencies: an ultra-sound is a very high frequency of sound which is used to detect objects with different frequencies, such as a baby in the womb. Every sound has a specific intention and effect: a police siren is designed to

be heard above all other sounds in the environment. So when we chant Om, we are remembering that we ourselves are vibrational beings and tuning into our innate creativity.

Chanting is the repetition of sacred words, names and syllables set to a rhythm or melody. These sacred words are called mantras – which means a tool of the mind (man means mind in Sanskrit). In Naad (Sound) yoga, chanting mantra induces a deep state of meditation.

Actually, we are chanting all the time. The inner soundtrack of our thoughts, feelings and sensations runs moment to moment and gives

rise to our outer expressions. When we chant consciously, we focus on one mantra, unifying the different aspects of our awareness - physical, mental, emotional, spiritual - in the present moment. In this way, mantra becomes medicine, giving rise to many benefits.

Bodily blessings: Singing does not happen in the throat alone, it is a full body vibration. Just sit for a moment and hum gently. You will feel the vibration begin to resonate in your lips, nose, face, up and down your spine and eventually all over your body.

Chanting lengthens and strengthens our breath cycle, boosting the amount of oxygen flowing around our body. This, in turn, enables increased blood flow to muscles and organs which can then function more effectively. As we breathe more deeply we engage the muscles of the diaphragm and abdomen, soothing the digestion and toning the tummy. Our whole body begins to hum and relax deeply. Happy hormones (endorphins) are triggered by glandular activity in the throat and brain, activating a deep inner smile.

Mental mantras: The rhythmic pulsations of music have been shown to restore regularity in the brainwaves of patients with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease. Scientists have demonstrated that the meditative state activated by chanting reduces the daily beta-wave rate and induces a state where slower alpha and theta waves are present, particularly in the frontal areas of the mind which control memory, creativity and language. In this relaxed state the mind spontaneously makes new connections, resolving unprocessed issues and gaining fresh perspectives. As we engage with the patterns and rhythms of chant, we stretch our self-expression, flexing our mental muscles and toning up our communication skills.

Emotional energising: The motion of chant sets the energy in our body (our e-motions) dancing. As the river of the chant flows on, our feelings are liberated to move, releasing stored tension and feelings. Tears and laughter may arise as the waves of sound wash through us. This is a wonderfully cleansing process which enables us to act with increased awareness and compassion towards ourselves and others.

Multi-sensory soul songs: The focused listening required for chanting enables us to access a heightened awareness of ourselves and our surroundings. Our mind chatter becomes absorbed in the chant, making more space for intuition and insight to emerge. Our sensory perception is heightened, stimulating our imagination and perception of colour, light and sound. We can become aware that everything and everyone is vibrating at different frequencies within the great symphony of life and become more aware of our unique vibration within it.

Connected community: Singing together allows us to dissolve our sense of isolation and separation in the world as we are absorbed in the group experience. The unity created by breathing and chanting together enables us to feel our innate connectedness.

Tone up, tune up: Tone is the means by which the powerful intentions of mantras are communicated. Tone refers to both the quality of a sound - our vocal tone is just as powerful as our muscle tone - and the actual sounds themselves. A simple way to explore this is by singing open vowel sounds (toning) in different ways and noticing how it affects you. In many spiritual traditions, tones are assigned to activate the organs and energy centres (chakras) of the body. As we resonate the tones of mantras we are re-tuning our whole system on every level.

Mantras are necklaces of tone beads where tones are combined with syllables that activate the powerful intentions. For example, AH is often described as the sound of the heart, and this tone is often found at the centre of mantras describing mother or love: *Ahem Prema* - I am Love (Sanskrit); *Ambe Ma* - Great Mother (Sanskrit); *Shima* - Love (Native American).