

Mantra

A mantra is a sacred utterance, a numinous sound, a syllable, word or phonemes, or group of words in Sanskrit believed by practitioners to have psychological and spiritual powers. A mantra may or may not have syntactic structure or literal meaning. The earliest mantras were composed in Vedic Sanskrit by Hindus in India, and are at least 3'000 years old. Mantras now exist in various schools of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

Mantras come in many forms. They are typically melodic, mathematically structured meters, believed to be resonant with numinous qualities. At its simplest, the word ohm (see right) serves as a mantra.



In more sophisticated forms, mantras are melodic phrases with spiritual interpretations such as a human longing for truth, reality, light, immortality, peace, love, knowledge, and action. Some mantras have no literal meaning, yet are musically uplifting and spiritually meaningful.



In Tibetan Buddhism, **Om mani padme hum** is probably the most famous mantra. It is the six syllable mantra of Avalokitesvara (or Chenrezig), the Bodhisattva of compassion. This mantra is particularly associated with the four-armed form of Avalokitesvara. HH 14th Dalai Lama is said to be an incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, and so this mantra is especially revered by his devotees.



Many Buddhists in Ladakh, Tibet, or Nepal carve mantras on rocks or stone slabs as a form of meditation. Such rocks or slabs are laid on stupas or walls, also called mani walls, which are usually found along traditional foot paths.

If you encounter such stupas and mani walls, please remember to circulate them in a clockwise direction.