

Do we ever stop saying the Mantra?

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This is an important question any meditator or group leader will be asked. Often we start feeling so relaxed after saying the mantra for a while, that the mantra may seem an interruption in the peace and quiet we are experiencing. But if we do let go off the mantra, we either lose this sense of peacefulness or we are just engaged in 'holy floating' or 'pernicious peace' as the Desert hermits called it. It was called 'pernicious', because we are not really praying/meditating any more, and have no chance of becoming aware of the presence of God at the centre of our being. When we have let go off our prayer word, we are just enjoying the results of relaxation and stay on the surface of our being. Yes, it is wonderful to feel relaxed and let go off our daily worries and stress, but we are not really meditating anymore. When you come out of this meditation session you might feel relaxed but a bit dreamy, not really fully 'there', but when you have been properly meditating you will feel alert, focused and energised.

There may well be moments when we are taken up in the spirit and are no longer aware of anything, including the mantra. But that is something over which we have no control. It is a pure gift of God, a grace. We cannot consciously make this happen.

John Main stressed:

“You say your mantra every morning and every evening for about twenty years or so. Then, one morning or one evening you are aware that you are not saying your mantra. As soon as you are aware that you are not saying it, you start saying it again. Those times of ‘not-saying’ the mantra might be a split second, might be three minutes, might be the whole half- hour. But if you are aware that for the whole half-hour you have not been saying your mantra, you can be sure you were not meditating, whatever else you were doing! A really important principle to get clear in your mind is: “Say your mantra until you cannot say it.” As soon as you are aware that you are not saying it, say it again. The way that the ancient monastic tradition expressed that was, “The monk who knows he is praying is not praying; the monk who does not know he is praying is praying.” Say the word as selflessly as you can: ma-ra-na-tha. And continue to say it. Continue to say your word for the whole time of the meditation. Return to it if you had let it go. Don’t bother about distractions; just keep saying your word.” (John Main – The Hunger for depth and meaning)

John Main also explained, that there is a gradual process of change in our saying the mantra. At first we say the mantra in our mind with a certain amount of effort, coming back to it gently every time we wander off into our world of thought; then over time we don’t actually say it mentally anymore, it sounds itself and we listen to it with whole-hearted attention. Finally it becomes part of our being and sounds itself in our heart.

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