

Boost Your Brain with the “SANSKRIT EFFECT”

The benefits for the brain of chanting mantras or reciting sacred texts in Sanskrit has moved from the realm of ardent devotees into the arena of hard science. James Hartzell, Ph.D., a neuroscientist researching the topic, has looked at physical changes that happen in the brain during the memorization and recitation of Sanskrit texts. He is calling this “The Sanskrit Effect.”

Hartzell has discovered that Sanskrit pandits have over ten percent more grey matter across both cerebral hemispheres, a measurement consistent with higher cognitive functioning. The right hippocampus, connected to long and short-term memory and sensitive to auditory and visual patterns, has also been shown to have more

grey matter across nearly seventy-five percent of its structure.

The sounds that stimulate both the physical and spiritual centers in the brain

appear to be particularly prominent in Sanskrit. Both speaking and singing require the placement of the tongue and lips in characteristic positions for the formation of specific sounds. This stimulates one or more of the eighty-four acupuncture meridians that end in the mouth, resulting in an invigorating effect on the brain.

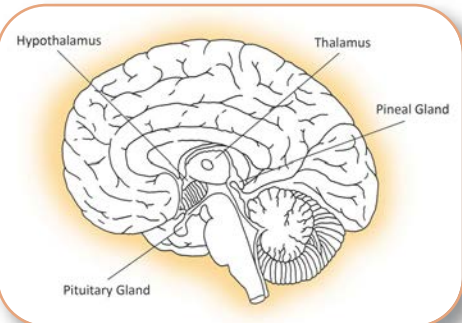
This, in turn, increases the energy flow to the pituitary, thalamus, hypothalamus, and pineal

Kathleen
Karlsen



glands. Each of these glands are important parts of the endocrine system, regulating metabolism, sleep, food intake and more. These glands are also purported to have significant roles in the development of spiritual faculties.

Some linguists believe that Sanskrit is closely related to *onomatopoeia*, the construction of words aligned with the sound associated with what is named (*cuckoo, sizzle, snap, splash!*). This is especially true of the bija seed syllables. These syllables are said to connect to fundamental vibrations in the natural world. They are common in mantras and often associated with particular gods or goddesses. Here’s a quick look at a few of the more common bija syllables:



OM: The Sanskrit word OM (*ohm or aum*) is familiar to most people as the quintessential mantra. OM is said to draw the energy from the bottom of the spine to the top of the head. In terms of healing, OM brings prana into the subconscious mind. OM

sheds light on addictive tendencies and negative emotions, bringing them to light for healing and transmutation. One of the simplest OM mantras is “OM, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti” meaning



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“OM, Peace, Peace, Peace.”

HRIM: The syllable HRIM (*hream*) is a mantra of divine power for the heart: the spiritual heart, the emotional heart and the physical heart. This mantra aids in longevity by energizing the heart. Due to the healing and stimulating influence on the heart, HRIM is also said to promote circulation and positively affects the lungs and nervous system. This bija mantra specifically relates to Parvati, the consort of Shiva. An example of a mantra using

HRIM is “OM HRIM Parvati Mata.”



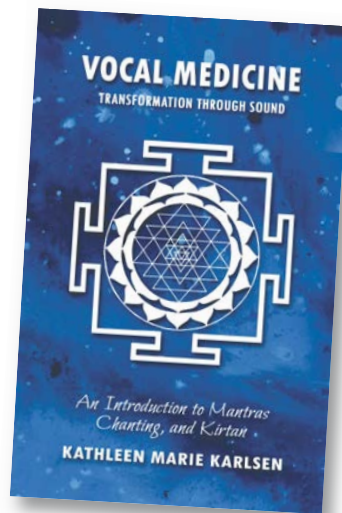
SHRIM: The sound of SHRIM (*shreem*) brings positive growth and development. SHRIM attracts energy, situations and people who are beneficial for our lives. SHRIM is a mantra of surrender and devotion. SHRIM

is specifically the mantra of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of abundance and wealth. An example of a mantra using SHRIM is “OM HRIM SHRIM Lakshmi Bhayo Namaha,” meaning “Lakshmi, reside in me and bestow thy abundance on all aspects of my existence!”

KRIM: The bija syllable KRIM (*kream*) is connected to the divine electricity that exists behind all things. This sound is like a mild, positive electrical stimulus. KRIM is the seed mantra of the goddess Kali, a fierce goddess known for her powers of transformation and mastery over both time and death. An example of a mantra using KRIM is “OM KRIM Kalikayei Namaha,” which calls the energy of Kali and her power into action in the world.

Help your brain form new connections and experience the fundamental forces in nature through the bija seed syllables, mantras and kirtan. Try using “The Sanskrit Effect” to feed your brain and life with positive energy and creative transformation! ■

This article is adapted from Kathleen Karlsen’s new book Vocal Medicine: Transformation through Sound (\$15.95). Kathleen’s book can be found at the Sacred Mysteries Bookstore in Livingston, ordered directly from Kathleen by email at kathleenkarlsen@msn.com, or purchased on Amazon or Barnes & Noble online. More info at KathleenKarlsen.com.



Illustrations shown here were drawn by Rose Karlsen.

Resource: “A Neuroscientist Explores the Sanskrit Effect,” James Hartzell, *Scientific American*, January 2, 2018.

Kathleen Karlsen regularly holds community kirtan and mantra workshops in the Bozeman area. She is the leader of the Shakti Bliss Kirtan Band and has completed two levels of training at the Kirtan Leadership Institute in Boulder, CO.



Contact Kathleen by email at kathleenkarlsen@msn.com or

call (406) 599-3235.