

YOGATM MAGAZINE

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LOVE EVERY BREATH OF LIFE.

NIRAJ NIAK

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Kabbalah

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&
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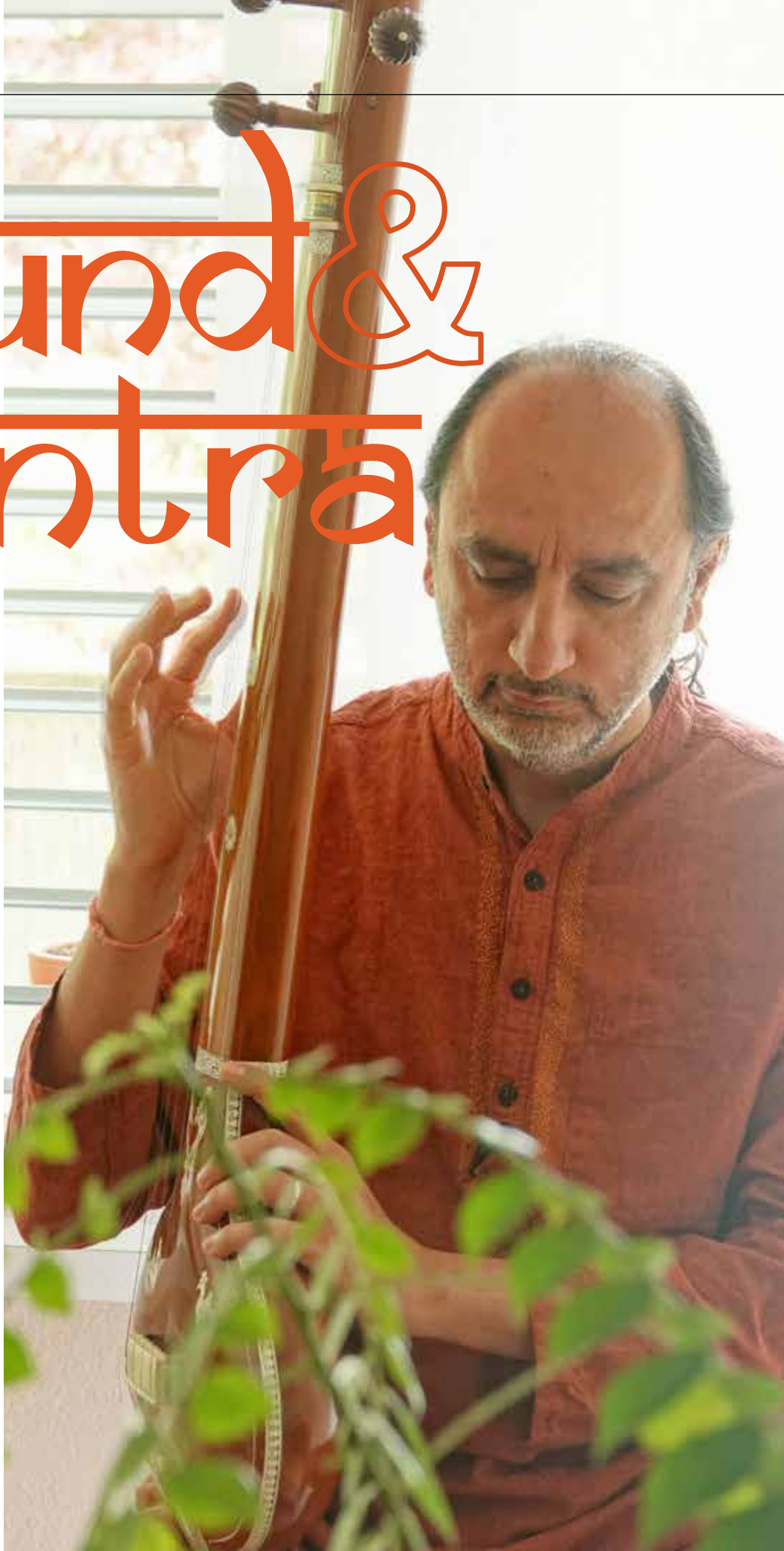
Sound & Mantra

MUSIC FROM INDIA IS MUCH MORE THAN SINGING MANTRAS AND FALLING INTO ECSTASY. **WITH THE RIGHT INTENTION, MOOD AND PRONUNCIATION, THESE SOUNDS CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS.**

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MANISH VYAS from India, living in Switzerland since a few years, has been involved with Indian music and the sacred music genre since the early age of 10. He's composer, singer, multi-instrumentalist, teacher, retreat conductor; and he's currently directing a documentary-film, *The True World of Mantra and Sacred Music from India*, which is planned to be released next year. He has till date 20 album releases, the next one - a mantra album - appearing worldwide next autumn.

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The *Rishis*, the ancient Indian mystics, have expressed through a term *NĀD-BRAHMA*: "Sound is Divine, Sound is everything." The first sound, the very first voice ever to be heard in the universe, according to Hindu mythology has been Om. This *Nādbrahma* exists in the entire universe and being a manifestation of the divine power, it is the purest sound or voice to be heard. In the word *Nāda*, *Nā* represents the vital air while *Da* means fire. That which comes out of the combination of these two is *Nāda* - sound.

All art forms from India have always been ruled by the concept of *rasa* - which can be translated as moods, flavor, character, essence. There are nine *rasa* in all forms of Indian art, may it be music, dance, painting, poetry, sculpture and others. They can be classified in romance, heroism, fury, compassion, comedy,

disgust, horror, wonder and peace. When one learns music from India, one is taught in depth the dimensions of this *rasa* key aspect to express this music. To be able to convey and reflect these various moods, the artist is taught different expressions in the voice, and also in the instruments this happens, to exactly convey the right essence.

In order to understand this, for example in mantra, the *rasa* of a Surya or sun mantra must be filled with fire energy, so a *raga* (combination of notes) is chosen accordingly and the voice must be powerful and firm, it cannot be sweet and romantic. When we sing a mantra about Karuna which means compassion, the energy should be loving, soothing - like the energy of compassion.

SCREAMING FOR KARUNA WITH ROCKING BEATS - SOMETHING LIKE THAT JUST CAN'T GO WELL.

There is an American artist who made a song of Karuna in a very over-exciting mood, shouting Karuna and using rock-energy...

so this obviously does not go. It will "scare" *Karuna* away immediately! In the same way, many western singers are singing the *Gayatri* Mantra like a lullaby, almost to go to sleep, which also is inadequate if they would know the right energy that *Gayatri* should carry to invoke its energy. In India singers put such huge feeling in their voice when they perform a song, that even if you don't understand the lyrics, you will relate to the energy and understand the mood - if it's romantic, if it's devotional, if it's loving, if it's a complaint, it's happy or sad, or if there is a longing for something... you will feel it.



spiritual path, one moves from *vaikhari* to *para*: from the most gross to the most subtle, or from the lower planes to the higher planes. As one gets more and more sensitive, meditative, conscious, aware, vulnerable, one's voice quality also changes. So that means if one wants to develop these aspects, one can experiment with the voice, by bringing more awareness, sensitivity, feeling, compassion, and that will reflect in the energy created within and without. When one is more conscious of the voice, the energy that is transmitted through that voice will be completely different, the choice of words will also

FROM SUBTLE TO AUDIBLE SOUND

When we are trying to achieve through music a particular energy or mood, particularly the voice and the singing technique are extremely significant in expressing a particular energy. As far as speech or sound is concerned, the Indian mystics also discovered four forms of sound or speech: *para* or transcendent sound, *pashyanti* or visualized sound, *madhyama* or mental sound and *vaikhari* or audible sound. According to one's progress in the





THE GOAL OF PERFORMANCE ARTS SINCE MILLENNIA IN INDIA, INCLUDING MUSIC, HAS NEVER BEEN ENTERTAINMENT; BUT ULTIMATELY HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO LET THE SPECTATOR EXPERIENCE HIS OWN CONSCIOUSNESS, SEE AND FEEL THE SPIRITUAL VALUES INNATE IN HIM, AND RISE TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

be different. A conscious person will choose lesser words to convey what is intended to be transmitted.

Nāda Yoga is the Yoga of Sound, it is an ancient mystic practice using voice, breath and movement as a way of healing, empowerment and self-realization. Sound can bring one into the state of union - into the state of Yoga.

In India, vocal music has the highest place, because the voice possesses the magnetism and expression that the instruments cannot fully offer, and also it reflects more directly the state of being of the person who is singing. All instruments in India try to play in such a way so that they can come as close as possible to the vocal music - two of the closest to human voice are the beautiful instruments called *Veena* and *Sarangi*, that's why these instruments have been so revered by Indian singers though they are very hard to play.

The *Natya Shastra*, the oldest surviving ancient Indian text written in Sanskrit on classical music and performance arts, begins its discussion by stating that "the human throat is a *Shareer Veena*, or a body's musical string instrument." Our body becomes our instrument when we sing. We tune this instrument through body posture, breath and specific vocal techniques.

NO FEAR OF SILENCE

Music has been an integral part of performance arts in the lifestyle of Sanatana Dharma (also known as Hinduism, though the first one is the real name) since its Vedic times, and that is why enlightened saints like Kabir, Nanak, Meera, Sahajo, Daya, Tukaram, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and many more transmitted their message to people through singing. They did not write books or scriptures or doctrines. They did not give discourses; they simply went around singing their songs of wisdom, truth

of life and divinity. In that way, they could resonate much more with people.

I have been fortunate to have been around a few enlightened beings during my life in India, since my childhood... and their voices were so hypnotic, that there was music when they spoke and when there was a gap between the words, the silence created in those gaps would take the listener to deep meditative depths. Through such Beings, I have learnt to bring more consciousness and awareness to the voice, to how and what to speak, and especially when to remain silent .and not be afraid of silence. It is amazing to experiment with the voice through its presence, absence and dynamics. In that way, the voice of an awakened one becomes a medium to connect with the divine.. and that is what we all are searching for, in one way or another.

HEAVY-METAL-EGO

Sanskrit language has been 'created' with such intention so that just uttering the language can purify the system. For





example, in the ancient tradition of mantra chanting practice, a practitioner is suggested to start the practice in a normal volume: *Vachika Japa*. After a certain period, it will be suggested to move to the second level of whispering: *Upanshu Japa*. The third stage would be chanting within, like mental chanting: *Manasika Japa* and the last stage has no action involved, the mantra will be vibrating in the person effortlessly on its own: *Ajapa Japa*, here it becomes part of one's system, like breathing, which happens automatically. This kind of practice can make a practitioner immensely alert, aware and sensitive about his or her own voice.

The voice technique especially used in the Indian Mantra practice is immensely healing, rejuvenating and energizing. When we are taught Sanskrit, it is not that in one session the teacher teaches a text or a Mantra, it doesn't work like that!. When one learns Sanskrit, a sound or mantra is repeated and practiced again and again for months, until every word or sound is pronounced 100% correctly. It's not only the pronunciation, there are also dynamics of voice: application of higher, middle and lower notes are accurately taught, as well as the length of words, where to pause, which words can be cut and which not, the accentuation, etc. Meanings in Sanskrit can change dramatically if all these variables are not correctly applied.

That is why I insist so much about this point in my workshops and gatherings - although some have called me 'strict', but it's not about being strict, it's about right or not-right.

Some don't understand that the way mantra is being shared publicly in the west is good for nothing... it's just an entertainment, because these artists never learnt any of these rules, and many times they sing or recite words that completely lose their meaning due to their ignorance about the subject - often I see that some singers even cut words to fit the text in their melodies distorting the mantra, so it's really bad - the problem is the audience has no idea what is going on - but if Sanskrit scholars would hear it, they will laugh or grab their heads.

As an example of these mistakes, I have personally heard a mantra singer from Germany, singing live the mantra *Aham-Brahmāsmi* or "I am the Absolute" - suddenly, out of ignorance I guess, this singer decided to separate the words, and started 'screaming'

Aham, Aham, Aham, which means nothing else than "ego," so in this case the words of the mantra

Aham + Brahmāsmi clearly cannot be separated. One has to know what can be split in a mantra and what not. Also, coming back to the subject 'voice', this person was also screaming like a heavy metal singer. Nothing against heavy metal, but not for mantra! So as I said before, the *rasa* he is transmitting is also completely wrong. So you can see in a simple example how things can get distorted, and audiences have no clue either. This is not a criticism, but a reflection of reality; in the end, there is also a need of higher consciousness and sensitivity within the audience, to be able to discern.

There is a reason why when a thousand trained Sanskrit priests chant Vedic texts for a certain purpose, the energy created through it is so condensed, powerful and amazing that the immediate space as well as everyone in the vicinity will be affected by the vibrations of these voices and if one is open and receptive, it can transit the listener to a total different realm.

INTENTION ALSO COUNTS

So this would be a proof that the sound is working. That is why it is very important to choose the authentic source when it comes to this practice, and not a "westernized" compromised version of an eastern cultural element; and that too in Sanskrit, one of the most difficult languages to learn and master. Actually, it is very simple to be discerning about this: if you want to enjoy the genuine music of Appenzell, you choose to listen to the people from Appenzell who have been there their whole life and who have grown up in that atmosphere, in that landscape, in that mood, and have learnt from the family traditions, the countryside, the mountains, the air, the sounds around them, the Swiss- German, the Appenzeller stories... and not someone from Japan who will not only mispronounce but will also not have the right *rasa* (character, personality, feeling, mood.) This discriminative sense can help us to be selective about the sounds we choose to hear.

IT IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT WHAT KIND OF SOUNDS WE UTTER, WITH WHAT INTENTION WE UTTER THEM, BECAUSE IT HAS TO BE BENEFICIAL NOT ONLY TO ONESELF BUT TO OTHERS ALSO.

This in India is called *Vak Shuddhi*, the purification of speech. It is not about saying 'nice things,' but to say them with full awareness, consciousness, sensitivity and with alertness. We can observe the voices and tones in our own self with a very simple example: when we are in love with someone and talk to that person, we speak very softly, lovingly, sensitively. And if we are angry with someone, we tend to speak loudly, insensitively at times, hurting unconsciously. In the first case, the voice is soft because there is a closeness between two hearts so one can whisper while in the second case, there is a big distance between those two hearts and that's why the voice becomes louder and insensitive. Therefore it is very important to surround yourself by the healing, energizing, relaxing, meditative, sensitive, peaceful sounds. There is vibration in the whole universe, there is sound everywhere, and of all kinds of them.

For the protection and uplifting of one's being, one has to carefully choose the sounds that one wants to be surrounded by.. ..whenever there is a choice available.

I apply all these understandings and gifts of profound wisdom in the music that I create and share. It has a very clear purpose, intention, supported by all the training of music and meditation that I have gone through during my life, since the age of nine. From the first album to the latest I have released,

I have always been very careful to apply these elements of sound that have been described here; in my journey of 25 years. This journey wouldn't have been the same without my music Gurus, and both my spiritual masters who have been an amazing guiding light in this direction. They understood the significance of proper use of sound and music, supported by silence. They also had great mastery of oration and reaching to the soul of a seeker - and they taught us the art of "being silent." That is the ultimate place to be. From that space, each word you may utter becomes a mantra, the blissful sound of the divinity - *Ānanda Nāda*.

