

Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Pema Siddhi Hum

Or, The Twelve Syllable Mantra

What is a mantra? A mantra, or dharani, is a sound, syllable, word, or group of words that is considered capable of 'creating transformation'. This mantra's intended meaning is explained below—giving the sense that is to be used by us—but there is more to this than explanations can provide. Some mantras are designed to create a resonance or vibration within the one chanting it. It is the location and type of resonance that the mantra syllables create, that is their real meaning. And this is why simply intoning that kind of mantra, rather than chanting it with a deep resonance within the correct part of the body, doesn't have the expected effect. In our case, this mantra evokes the components, character, and effects of the meditation technique we are using, in order to open up the conditions within our mind for the successful practice of this technique, because as Lama Thubten Yeshe once said: "Reciting a mantra...does not mean the mere vocal repetition of speech syllables. Many meditators know from experience that the act of reciting mantras transcends external sounds and words. *It is more like listening to a subtle inner sound that has always inhabited our nervous system.*" It is the discovery of the subtle inner spontaneous sounds that is the reason for using this mantra.

Précis of "Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Pema Siddhi Hum":

"Om" : "Om" is related to the Crown chakra. Traditionally, it is considered to be the primordial creative sound/vibration from which all things become manifested. In this practice it represents the primordial inner spontaneous sound stream which is the autogenous resonances of the manifestation of our microcosmic body. Our hands are held in the prayer (Anjali) mudra, representing heartfelt intent, or longing, as we touch the crown of our head with the base of our thumbs.

"Ah" : "Ah" embodies the principle of creative sound and pure speech, and is therefore the essential wisdom of the generative source of all that manifests. Wisdom in the sense of "knowing how to do the correct thing, the right action, choosing the best possibility in every context." In traditional contexts, "Ah" is associated with the Throat chakra because of our normal focus on human speech, but in this practice, it is associated with the Third-Eye chakra—the wisdom eye—and its connection to all sounds and Elements. Our hands move down from the Crown chakra to the Third Eye chakra, while still held in the prayer mudra, touching the interphalangeal joint of the thumbs to the Third-Eye location between and slightly above the level of ones eyes.

"Hum" : The first "Hum" represents the root vibration or sound that descends from the Crown chakra into the heart. In this practice, this syllable is associated with the Heart chakra because it is the venue for the manifestation of Great Responsiveness. Our hands move down from the Third Eye chakra to the Heart chakra, continuing to be held in the prayer mudra, touching the full length of each thumb to the central part of the chest at the level of the heart.

“Benza” (Vajra) : We then put our hands into the “Om Sound Gesture” (Vajrahumkara). The wrists are crossed over the heart. The right hand crosses over the left at the wrist, palms facing inwards towards the heart, symbolizing the union of method and wisdom, leading to the realization of Great Responsiveness (Mahākarunā). Vajra indicates the nature of reality, or Sunyata, indicating endless Creativity, Potency (in the sense of containing the embryonic Wisdom that manifests all forms of being), and Great Responsiveness.

“Guru” : “Guru” translates as “wise teacher.” In this practice these syllables correspond to Avalokitasvara, the Buddha of Compassion, who became a “Perfected Body of Compassion” through the manifestation of great responsiveness, and who is the source of the most comprehensive description of meditation using inner spontaneous sound (found in the Surangama Sutra). We uncross and extend our hands in a mudra of openness and receiving, arms straight out in front of us, parallel to each other, with our hands extending out and with open palms up.

“Pema” : “Pema” signifies the lotus flower, representing the purity of the enlightened mind, as the lotus flower, though growing in muddy water, is completely stainless. As these two syllables are voiced, we stack our spine, causing our arms, which are outstretched before us, to open wide on both sides of the body, like leaves on a plant, as our upper body becomes erect, mirroring the motions of a germinating plant.

“Siddhi” : “Siddhi” signifies the accomplishment of supermundane powers, including Great Responsiveness, and complete Enlightenment (the Supreme Siddhi). We raise our hands upward, moving the palms towards each other above the crown of the head.

“Hum” : The final syllable of “Hum” signifies, first, our longing for enlightenment, in the sense of “May it be so!”, and finally as the attained wisdom mind. As our hands are moved up from “Siddhi”, “Hung” is voiced upon the meeting of the palms in a Prayer mudra. On the final repetition of this exercise, at the end of our practice session, rather than the palms coming together, while our arms are still shoulder-width apart, the fingers of both hands are snapped—representing the sudden attainment of complete Enlightenment.



*How Does “Vajra” Become “Benza”?

Va jra: V is not really V. It’s usually a W or a B. Nepalese and Tibetan people understand it to be a B in this context, so it’s *Ba jra*.

Ba jra: J is not really J. In the Tibetan alphabet there is a Ch row and a Ts row of consonants. This Sanskrit J is spelled with the Tibetan letter that we write (in Roman letters) as DZ (which is in the TS row – “TS TSH DZ NY”), so it’s: *Ba dzra*.

Ba dzra: So, “badzra” is a completely legitimate spelling, but Tibetans love to insert nasalizations —“N”—wherever possible, so it’s: *Bandzra*.

Bandzra: According to Tibetan spelling rules, a final N consonant on a syllable – BAN – changes the vowel like this: A > ä > e, so it’s *Bendzra*.

Bendzra: Then, Tibetans don’t like compound consonants. So they just ‘think’ R, but they don’t really say it, so it’s pronounced *Bendza*, or *Benza*.

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