

Maxine's Chanting Article

*This article is aimed at a non-Jewish audience
of yoga practitioners and appeared in the
winter Yoga Center newsletter in Roanoke, VA.*

Chanting in Hebrew Group At the Yoga Center

Why chanting?

What is it about chant that speaks to us at such a deep level? Why has chanting found its way into so many cultures and religions around the world both ancient and modern?

Though it takes many forms, chant basically combines words (or syllables - like OM), music and rhythm to form a sacred phrase which is repeated over and over again. Chanting becomes a form of vocal meditation, or as my teacher Rabbi Shefa Gold says: "A way of transforming words into doorways, entrances into expanded states of consciousness." Through chanting we are able to focus the mind, and shift our conscious from the outside to the inside world of the chant and then to our spiritual core.

There is a huge difference between chanting and ordinary singing. Sure chant can be very beautiful - who hasn't responded to the music of, say, Gregorian chants - but the purpose of chant is primarily a meditative process, and inward focus. It's about breath, heart, spirit, intention and voice all coming together, much like our yoga practice joins together physical postures with many other parts of our being.

Many spiritual traditions also have a deep understanding of the power of sound vibration and language. Different sounds affect us differently - if you doubt it try listen to the music of a rippling waterfall and then a rush hour traffic jam! Among them, the Jewish spiritual tradition has long held the Hebrew language as sacred and developed practices using the repetition of sacred Hebrew phrases for meditation.

I have been studying a meditative practice of using Hebrew chant for several years and am currently in a chant leadership training program. We have started a chant group at the Yoga Center that meets on the first Sunday of the month 6:45-7:45. Check with the center each month to confirm the specifics.

NO knowledge of Hebrew at all is necessary and NO knowledge of Judaism.

Singing ability doesn't matter either.

In the group we chant and - even more importantly - learn about using the silence after we chant to go deeper within. Join us.

Maxine Fraade