

yoga

JOURNAL

5 poses to help you age gracefully

awaken your heart

Find courage, peace, confidence

Meditation for **creativity**

5 moves for a **supple spine**

Yoga for the **whole family**

Grains to up your **vitamin** intake

+
ENERGIZING
HOME PRACTICE
with **FREE MUSIC**
DOWNLOAD



HEALTH

FITNESS

FOOD

TRAVEL

HOME

WORK

NATURE

MONEY

RELATIONSHIPS

SPirituality

AUGUST 2008

YOGAJOURNAL.COM

SOME PEOPLE CONNECT to their deepest selves through sitting meditation; others find their spiritual truth in asana. Along with my yoga practice, I have a daily practice of creating *yantras*, geometric designs conceived of as containers for spiritual energy. In the Himalayan region of Northern India, where their use has been traced back to around 2000 BCE, they are used to cultivate the universal healing qualities they are thought to contain.

The practice originates from the use of mantra (sound vibrations) and yantra (visual depictions of the sound vibrations) in a science known as Tantra. In Sanskrit, *tantra* can be translated as “to weave”; as we cultivate awareness, we see how the Divine weaves itself through our daily lives.

A curious chain of events led me to discover yantras. Shortly after arriving in New York from London in the early 1990s in order to complete a master’s degree in fine arts, I discovered the Jivamukti Yoga Center. It became an oasis for me, and soon yoga became my primary passion. After training and teaching there for four years, I began to wonder how I could bring together my devotion to yoga and my love of art.

One day I stumbled upon Harish Johari’s book *Tools for Tantra*. Johari, who died in 1999, was a contemporary Tantric master. As a temple sculptor, he immersed himself in the arts and explored Ayurveda, the breath, astrology, numerology, gemology, and traditional Hindu mythology. He firmly believed that the practice



**Cultivate creativity
and inner peace as you
create and meditate on
these potent designs.**

Drawn Inward

of drawing, coloring, and meditating with your chosen yantra was key to acting with kindness and a receptivity that allows grace to permeate all of your actions.

Johari’s depictions of the colored geometric forms known as yantras spoke to me. I bought

the book, and a few weeks later I was able to take a yantra painting class with Johari on what turned out to be one of his last visits to the United States.

During the workshop, I fell in love with the practice. I spent the entire weekend creating what is known as the Bliss design. Focusing intently on the image and absorbing its beauty was deeply soothing. Yet it also brought me an ecstatic feeling I had only previously read about. Before long I found myself on a plane en route to

India, where I lived with Johari's family and learned the art of creating yantras.

ART OF MEDITATION

If you would like to pursue a meditative practice but have found traditional sitting meditation difficult to stick with, yantra making could be for you. The beautiful images you create reflect back the time and devotion that goes into their preparation and encourage you along the path. Yantra meditation can also be helpful if

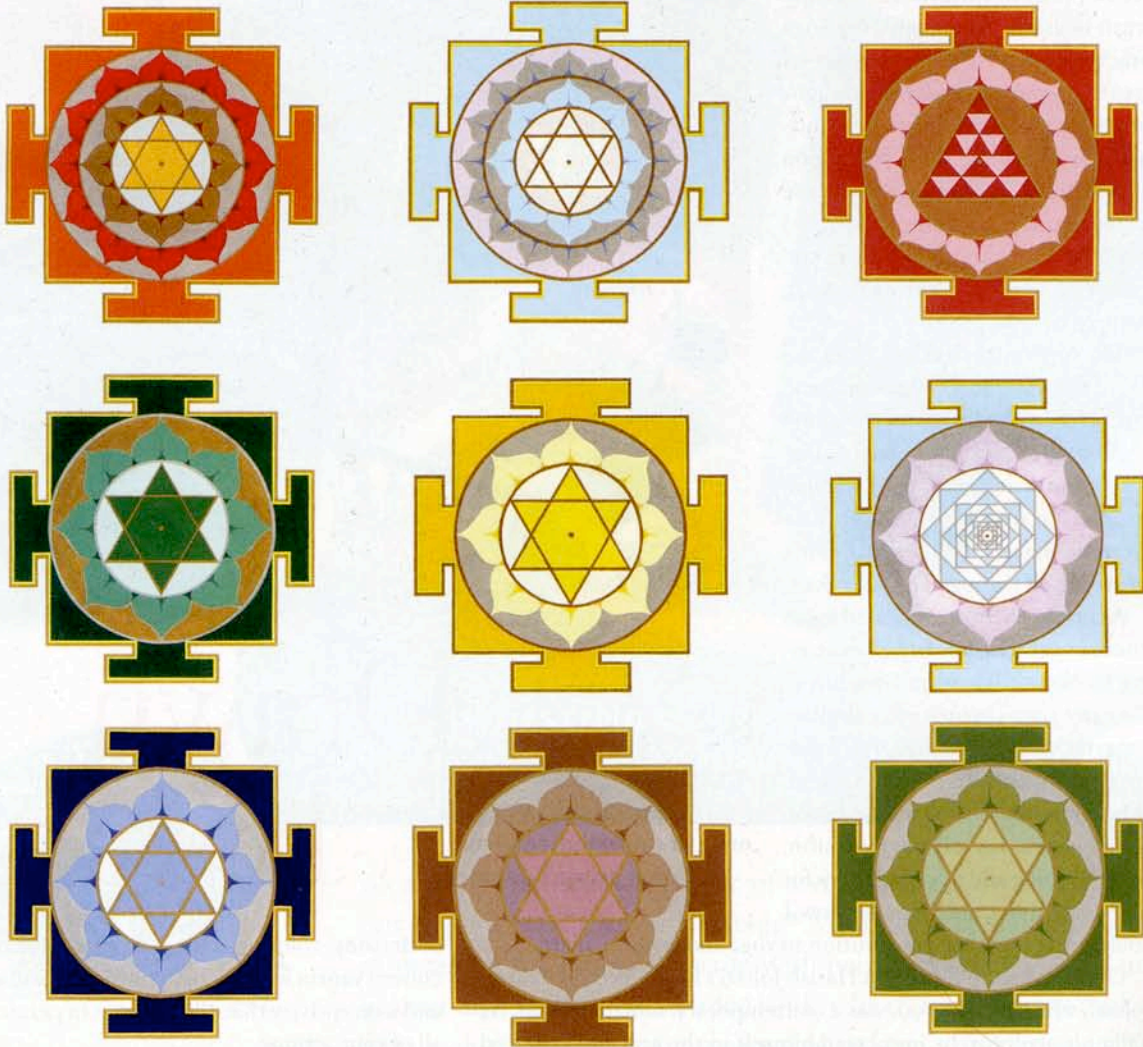
you are involved in a creative process and need to unblock your creative energy.

The beauty of the images continues to work its magic long after the yantras have been created and used in meditation. They can be placed in your home or office to bring divine energy into your surroundings. And the specific effect of the practice will depend on the design you choose to work with.

Now it is your turn to interact with the nine designs (see pictures below).

feast your eyes Let your eyes play over the nine designs

and settle on the one that attracts you most strongly. Don't read "The Qualities of the Nine Designs" on page 75 just yet—instead, allow the colors and shapes to speak to you.



FIND YOUR DESIGN

Sit in a comfortable place where you can easily gaze at the designs on page 72. Begin by closing your eyes and taking a few long, deep inhalations and exhalations. Feel your body becoming more comfortable and relaxed with each breath.

When you are ready, open your eyes slowly and look over the nine designs, absorbing their colors and shapes. (Don't look at their descriptions in "The Qualities of the Nine Designs" sidebar just yet.) Notice if any of the designs speak to you in this instant. Several may attract you, but after a few moments it's likely that one will strike you more vividly than the others do.

Once you've settled on one, check out "The Qualities of the Nine Designs" (opposite page) to learn about the key qualities attributed to the design you have chosen. You will likely find that the qualities described resonate with you.

There are several options for creating a meditative practice around the design you've chosen. The simplest is to make a color copy of it, then gaze at it while you meditate.

If you want to engage more deeply with the process, you can draw the geometric lines yourself, fill the shapes with color—or do both. For outlines of the designs that you can print out and color in, go to yogajournal.com/yantras.

COLOR YOUR WORLD

If you're going to color the yantra yourself, crayons and colored pencils work well. Start at the top of the form and work in a clockwise direction. Move from the outer shapes to the *bindu*, the dot in the center. By working in this way, you are mirroring the internal process of moving away from the external chatter of the mind as you spiral inward to your center.

Each color is thought to emit a frequency that resonates with the chosen design, so it's helpful to stay within the color palette shown here. For example, the Passion yantra should always be red—but feel free to create a shade of red that's pleasing to you. The coloring process is a large part of the meditation, so bring your full awareness with you!

the qualities of the nine designs

The qualities of the yantra you've chosen should reflect qualities you currently need in your life. To learn more about the qualities and how to manifest them, visit ayurvedayogainstitute.com.

left-hand column

top: **Radiance** Sunny optimism, self-confidence, magnetism. Enables your joy and good spirits to reach and affect others you connect with.

middle: **Intellect** Judgment, equilibrium, balance. Calms the nervous system and invites the mind toward equanimity.

bottom: **Organization** Order, discipline, a quiet mind. Patience and endurance are maximized.

middle column

top: **Nourishment** Nurturance, sustenance, compassion. Cultivates feminine and receptive attributes.

middle: **Expansion** Growth and opulence, luck, generosity of spirit, and creating community. Opens your heart to opportunities for charity and sharing and suggests new horizons.

bottom: **Uniqueness** Independence, originality, exploration. Awareness of your authentic voice and ideas.

right-hand column

top: **Passion** Direction, purpose, enthusiasm, and independence. Allows you to realize your dreams and achieve great feats with desire, meaning, and joy.

middle: **Bliss** Sensuality, an appreciation of beauty, art, and refinement. Gives you access to the positive aspects of your senses.

bottom: **Spirituality** Mystical experiences, solitude, purification. The peace you find within.

READY TO MEDITATE

Set your yantra before you while sitting comfortably, either at your desk or on a cushion on the floor. The bindu will be your focal point. Place the yantra at a height where you can gaze effortlessly at it. Center yourself with a few long, calm breaths to begin.

As you look at the bindu over several minutes, you will see the colors and forms of the whole yantra in your peripheral vision. Recall the process of choosing, drawing, coloring in, and absorbing the yantra, all the steps it took to arrive at this point. As you do this, the colors and lines will begin to seep into your being at a deep level.

After a period of gazing at the bindu, close your eyes. Allow the afterimage to wash over your internal awareness. You may still see the yantra in your mind's eye for several minutes. As the image fades, observe the sensations and feelings of tranquillity that arise.

Sit comfortably in this inner space for a few more moments. When you feel the process is complete and you've reached a peaceful place, slowly deepen your breath and energize your body before transitioning into the next part of your day.

I've found that creating a yantra delivers me at the doorstep of my peaceful heart, my center. The steps taken in its creation actually carve a pathway to this door. The particular path you take depends on the design you've chosen, but all the designs ultimately lead to the same place. I hope you enjoy both the journey and the arrival. ■

Sarah Tomlinson, co-director of the Ayurveda Yoga Institute of New York, teaches yantra painting and Ayurveda Yoga. To learn more about her, visit yantratecture.com.

This article is adapted with permission from Nine Designs for Inner Peace, by Sarah Tomlinson (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2008). Find it at destinybooks.com.