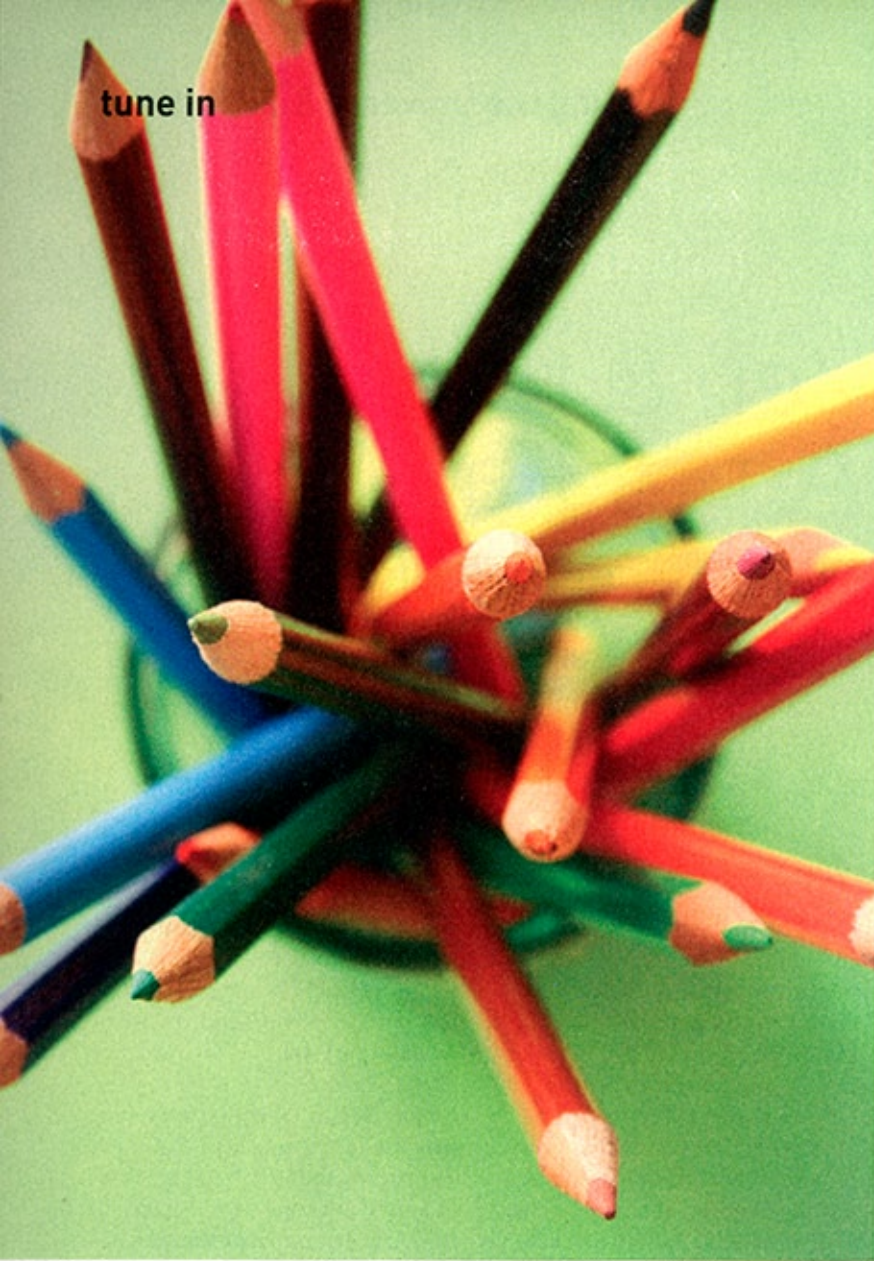


tune in



Drawn to Peace

Yantra meditation helps you color your way to a quiet mind

BY SHELL FISCHER

Do you remember a time, back in your childhood, when you would plunk down with a large box of crayons and spend the next several hours happily engrossed in a coloring book? Perhaps you remember singing along, blissfully unaware of everything but the new swatches of color coming alive on the page. Maybe your coloring had a meditative effect — though you wouldn't have called it that back then.

Today, as an adult, you can access that same peaceful, creative feeling through the ancient Tantric art of creating *yantras* — elaborate geometric patterns designed to help those who draw them cultivate a sense of centeredness, inner awareness and peace. This practice, which can be traced back to 2000 BCE in the Himalayan region of Northern India, has only recently been introduced in America, most notably by 40-year-old Sarah Tomlinson, founder of the Ayurveda-Yoga Institute of New York, who has written a new book on the subject, *Nine Designs for Inner Peace: The Ultimate Guide to Meditating with Color, Shape, and Sound* (Destiny Books, 2008).

Tomlinson, one of the last people to study with Indian yantra master Harish Johari before his death in 1999, believes creating yantras is especially beneficial for energetic people who have found traditional sitting meditation difficult, or for those seeking a new way of tapping deeper into their creative and spiritual selves. "It's the same thing as meditation, but different people have different tendencies," Tomlinson says. "Some people do better working with something [like a candle or beads], and others do better staring at a white wall. But some need an activity to lead their minds to that spot."

There is a specific yantra for every one of the nine qualities considered essential to wellbeing: radiance, nourishment, passion, intellect, expansion, bliss, organization, uniqueness and spirituality. "Whichever one you're drawn to, it's usually the one you need right now," Tomlinson says.

As you're painting or coloring your chosen yantra — a process that can take more than eight hours, ideally in separate sessions — you're encouraged to recite a mantra that directly relates to its specific quality: such as chanting *Om Ram Rahuve Namaha* ("I honor my uniqueness") while coloring the Uniqueness Design. "The actual yantra comes from the mantra; the vibration of the color is generated by the vibration of the sound," Tomlinson says. "So when you use the two together, somehow it just amplifies the effect."

Traditionally, yantras are colored in clockwise from the outer elements to the central point of stillness (or *bindu*) within. "You always start from the outside, which represents the mind as it relates to society or your personality in the world," Tomlinson explains. "So as you journey through the body or landscape of the yantra, you're really journeying toward the more inner parts of your being, away from the external."

The nine yantras Tomlinson presents in her book are just a starting point. There are an infinite number of yantras — one for every mantra. When practiced mindfully, Tomlinson believes the yantras serve as a form of visual yoga. "In the same way every *asana* (pose) is very specific in the effect that it has, the yantras are like that, too. They're already tried and tested, and have a very specific outcome, and there's something really [wonderful] about that." 🍃

Brooklyn-based freelance writer Shell Fischer has practiced yoga and meditation for the past 10 years. She recently completed her first novel, The Joy of Mom.



Tools to get started

Books like Sarah Tomlinson's *Nine Designs For Inner Peace* provide outlines of designs to copy and color, but you can always do it yourself from scratch. Here's what you'll need:

- A sharp, medium weight pencil
- A transparent ruler with faint grid lines
- An eraser with sharp corners
- A mechanical drawing compass
- Gouache paint, or colored pencils
- One pad of 12 x 15-inch 140 lb watercolor paper (for gouache paint, use cold-pressed paper, which has a slightly rougher surface. For colored pencils, use a smoother, hot-pressed paper).

Framing your completed yantras is the preferred way of protecting them and honoring their power. The following directions are considered optimum for their placement:

- Radiance (Sun): East
- Nourishment (Moon): Northwest
- Passion (Mars): South
- Intellect (Mercury): North
- Expansion (Jupiter): Northeast
- Bliss (Venus): Southeast
- Organization (Saturn): West
- Uniqueness (Rahu): Southwest
- Spirituality (Ketu): Southwest

