

MANTRAM REPETITION

Pandemic Stress First-Aid: Practical Portable Tools for Self-Care

MANTRAM PARTICIPANT MANUAL FOR MILITARY CAREGIVERS



PSYCHARMOR[®]
Institute



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History of Mantram Repetition Program

Jill Bormann, PhD, RN, FAAN is a clinical nurse specialist in adult psychiatric/mental health nursing, a health scientist, consultant, and clinical professor at the University of San Diego (USD) Hahn School of Nursing and Health Sciences. She also serves on the PsychArmor Institute's Caregiver Advisory Board.

Bormann has always held an interest in spirituality and health. Based on her clinical experience, she observed that patients who practiced repeating a mantram daily, intermittently, and silently, reported that it helped them “calm down” and manage a wide range of unwanted thoughts and feelings. She developed the Mantram Repetition Program in 2000 and began a program of research to assess the health benefits of the program.

She has conducted studies in groups of Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), adults living with HIV/AIDS, family caregivers of Veterans with dementia, healthcare employees with burnout, first-time mothers, nursing students, and homeless women. She received research funding from the National Institutes of Health, VA Health Services Research, VA Clinical Research and Development, and VA Nursing Service. The Mantram Repetition Program is an effective, complementary approach to symptom management that is invisible, inexpensive, non-pharmacological, and complementary to mainstream medicine.

Her work has been published in national and international scientific journals. Her vision is to share these easily-used methods with as wide an audience as possible.

Bormann has been recognized for innovative, holistic nursing by the American Academy of Nursing's Raise the Voice Edge-Runner Distinction. Bormann was selected for the VA Secretary's Award for Nursing Excellence in an Expanded Role in 2014. She received research excellence awards from the International Society of Psychiatric Nurses and the American Psychiatric Nursing Association in 2017. For more information see: <https://www.jillbormann.com/>



Mantram Repetition for Self-Care

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Our society values busy schedules, multi-tasking, and moving quickly through our day. Competing priorities, time constraints, work demands, and the needs of family and friends can all contribute to stress in one's life. This is particularly true for our nation's military caregivers, such as yourself. The unique challenges presented when caring for service members and Veterans can result in overwhelming stress and caregiver burnout. According to a recent report from the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving, over ¾ of caregiver respondents from across the country reported increased caregiving-related stress since the beginning of the pandemic¹. The need for additional mental health support and resources for self-care is increasingly evident.

The Mantram Repetition Program (MRP) is an evidence-based meditative practice that aims to build a person's stress management toolkit. Some of the benefits include:

- Focus attention
- Slow thinking for mental clarity, increased awareness
- Interrupt the stress response
- Prevent burnout

Philosophy of Mantram Repetition

The philosophy of the Mantram Repetition Program emphasizes that all human beings have mind, body and spirit with inner spiritual resources.



Love



Kindness



Wholeness



Compassion



Joy



Peace

We believe these inner resources can be accessed when the mind is calm. Mantram Repetition is a "rapid focus tool" that can help quiet and calm the mind.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a mantram?

A mantram is a spiritual word, phrase, or brief prayer that we repeat silently to ourselves to calm the body, quiet the mind and improve concentration to restore the spirit.

Can I use any word or phrase?

We recommend using a word or phrase that has spiritual connections and has been handed down for generations—it has passed the “test of time.”

How do I choose a mantram?

See list on next page. Pick one that has a positive feeling, meaning or even sound. Try it out and see how it feels to you.

How do I use a mantram?

Use it simply by repeating it to yourself as often as you can— silently, aloud, or in writing.

When can I use it?

Anytime! In the beginning, repeat it when you don't need it. With practice, you'll be able to use it during stressful times. Repeat it every night before sleep, when you are waiting in lines, while walking.

How often will I need to use my mantram?

The more you use it, the better results you'll notice. Build the mental muscle of your mind.

Will it help me feel less stress? To sleep better? To improve quality of life?

With practice and persistence, yes! The more you use it, the better you'll feel, think, and be.

Differences Between Mantram and Sitting Meditation

Mantram

Raise awareness of one's thoughts to help gain control over them

Can be used anytime, anywhere (as long as it is safe to do so)

Can be accessed quickly while you are doing a mechanical task

VS

Meditation

Teaches one to “transcend” thought by sitting 20 minutes twice per day

Tied to a specific time and place

Shouldn't be done while doing another mechanical task

Benefits of Mantram Repetition

Research shows that the Mantram Repetition Program reduces psychological distress, improves health and wellbeing, and helps us slow down and focus attention to improve personal performance². MRP helps us pause so that we may intentionally respond rather than automatically react. Studies have shown several benefits for military caregivers including³:

- Significant reductions in caregiver burden
- Improved quality of life satisfaction
- Increased ability to manage emotions
- Improved mental health

Mantram as self-care

As mentioned above, mantram repetition is a useful tool for managing stress in the workplace and in one's personal life. It is also a useful tool for general self-care as it encourages intentionally in thought and behavior that leads to a life that is more in line with a person's values and priorities. The benefits that may be particularly appealing to military caregivers include:

- No-cost, immediately accessible when you need it
- Can be done at any time and anywhere
- Can be used to manage one's emotions to maintain mental health⁵
- Stress management tool, especially when combined with slowing down and one-pointed attention
- Used to help stay in the present moment
- Used to replace unwanted, unhelpful thoughts

How to Choose a Mantram

Much care should be taken in choosing a mantram. Take your time and choose it wisely. Avoid words that evoke negative associations or bad memories. Choose one that appeals to you or offers strength and support. Choose one that is compatible with your religious background and/or spiritual beliefs. (A list of recommended mantrams is provided on page 6). Some people find it easy to choose a mantram while others need to try it out for a few days or weeks; however, some people find that they had trouble picking a new one because they had already created a habit of repeating their initial mantram.

Intentional Practice:

Once you have chosen your mantram, take a few minutes to practice mantram repetition. Repeat mantram to clear out and replace all other thoughts. You can repeat it while sitting quietly at first, but later it can be repeated throughout the day, intermittently, with eyes open or closed—it doesn't matter. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes and begin repeating your mantram. If your mind begins to wander, gently guide it back to your mantram. Your mind will run off like a puppy chasing a squirrel and you need to call it back firmly, kindly, and consistently. In the box below, reflect on this experience and feelings or thoughts that may have surfaced during your practice.

List of Recommended Mantrams

MANTRAM	MEANING
Om mani padme hum (<i>Ohm mah-nee pahd-may hume</i>)	An invocation to the jewel (Self), in the lotus of the heart
Namo Butsaya (<i>Nah-mo Boot-see-yah</i>)	I bow to the Buddha
My God and My All	St. Francis of Assisi's phrase
Maranatha (<i>Mah-rah-nah-tha</i>)	Lord of the Heart (Aramaic)
Kyrie Eleison (<i>Kir-ee-ay Ee-lay-ee-sone</i>)	Lord have mercy
Christe Eleison (<i>Kreest-ay Ee-lay-ee-sone</i>)	Christ have mercy
Jesus, Jesus	Son of God
Hail Mary or Ave Maria	Mother of Jesus
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me	Jesus prayer
Rama (<i>Rah-mah</i>)	Eternal joy within
Om Namah Shivaya (<i>Ohm Nah-mah Shee-vah-yah</i>)	Invocation to beauty and fearlessness
Om Prema (<i>Ohm Pray-mah</i>)	A call for universal love
Om Shanti (<i>Ohm Shawn-tee</i>)	Invocation to eternal peace
Shalom (<i>Shah-ome</i>)	Peace, completeness
So Hum (<i>So Hum</i>)	I am that Self within
Barukh Atah Adonoi (<i>Bah-rookh At-tah Ah-doh-nigh</i>)	Blessed art Thou, King of the Universe
Ribono Shel Olam (<i>Ree-boh-no Shel O-lahm</i>)	Master of the Universe
Bismallah Ir-Rahman ir-Rahim (<i>Beese-mah-lah ir-Rah-mun ir-Rah-heem</i>)	In the name of the merciful, the compassionate
O Wakan Tanka (<i>Wah-Kahn Tahn-Kah</i>)	Great Spirit

How to Use Your Mantram

Silently repeat the mantram throughout the day as frequently as you can. It does not matter how many repetitions in each session—repeat it once or fifty times. Just repeat it often! Begin your practice by repeating the mantram before you go to sleep every night and even when napping. Using the mantram when you are in a relaxed state allows the words to connect to the physiological state of being relaxed. Then when you repeat the mantram in a stressed state you are drawing from the mantram and its connection to the relaxed state.

The process of repeating your mantram may seem silly at first, and your mind (and yourself) will find all sorts of reasons to resist repeating it: “this is too silly, too easy, it won’t work, etc.” You are learning to train attention which will require gentle persistence and consistent repetition of your mantram. The best way to tell if it is “working” for you is to evaluate your reactivity to people and events that normally upset you. After awhile, you’ll begin to notice an ability to “pause” before reacting, giving you more time to make choices about how to respond to annoying situations.

Phases of Practice

Mechanical —▶

Might seem silly or monotonous.

Superficial use of mantram.

Healthy skepticism.

Experiential —▶

Occurs after a few weeks.

“Aha” moment of calm

Others may notice a change before you do.

Habitual

Becomes a habit with time & daily practice.

Comes to you when you need it and when you don’t need it.

A full-page background image of a person standing in the shallow waves of a beach. The person is a small silhouette in the center of the frame, standing in the water where the waves are breaking. The water is a deep, textured blue-grey, and the beach is visible at the bottom of the frame.

Easwaran says it best:

"The mantram is most effective when we say it silently, in the mind, with as much concentration as possible...I recommend repeating the mantram silently and not dwelling on tune and rhythm and such matters. Anything which takes attention away from the mantram itself, such as counting, or worrying or intonation, or connecting the mantram with physiological processes, only weakens the mantram's effect."

Reflection:

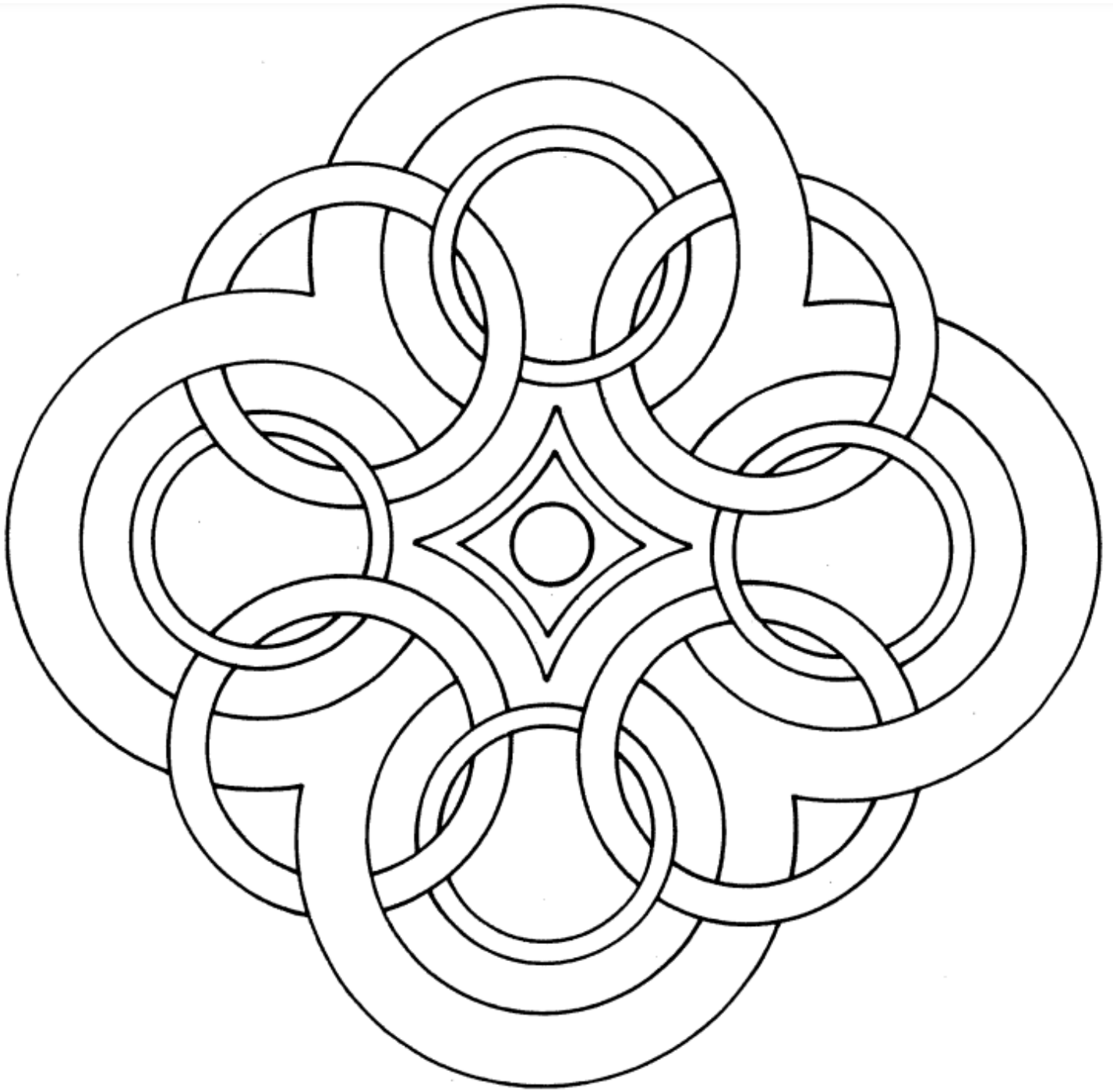
The key to strengthening your mantram practice is to use your mantram whenever possible. Repetition is the key. Each time the Mantram is repeated gives us a tiny respite. To help integrate your mantram practice into your daily routine, make a list of times at which you can use your mantram. Think about feelings, places, activities with which you associate stress or worry and write them down here.

Ex. While waiting at a stoplight, When I am feeling overwhelmed

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Practice:

Another way you can use your mantram is by creating a piece of mantram art by writing your mantram with different colored pens or markers on a mantram art template. Use the template to the right to practice writing your mantram while also practicing one-pointed attention and slowing down by focusing on each stroke as you write, letter by letter.



Ways to Use Your Mantram as a Rapid Focus Tool

While doing mechanical tasks that don't require one's full attention:

- Cleaning the house, such as sweeping, vacuuming or washing dishes
- Mowing the lawn or doing other yard work
- Daily hygiene tasks, such as brushing teeth or taking a shower

While waiting (for anything):

- For someone who is late
- In the grocery store line
- For a doctor's appointment
- While waiting "on hold" on telephone

While exercising:

- Walking to and from the car
- Jogging, running, riding a bike
- Doing any repetitive exercise

During annoying situations:

- Dealing with difficult people
- When other are impatient or irritated with us
- Dealing with insomnia or nightmares

Managing unwanted thoughts or emotions:

- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Jealousy
- Anger
- Guilt
- Depression
- Fear
- Resentment
- Ruminating thoughts, compulsions or addictions

Situations that healthcare providers and Peer Supports might encounter:

- Giving a patient or family bad news
- Dealing with pain, illness or surgery
- While in the presence of a dying person
- Before an appointment with a patient
- Walking to and from meetings
- Before performing a procedure

Use your mantram every night to relax and help you fall asleep. It can help with insomnia.

WHEN NOT TO USE A MANTRAM: While doing tasks that demand your attention!

- Planning and problem solving
- Using dangerous machinery
- While reading or concentrating on a subject
- DRIVING: NOTE—This is a controversial topic as some people may fall asleep at the wheel while saying the mantram, while others use it to keep them calm. The Mantram Handbook says NOT to repeat the mantram while driving, but our research has shown that it can help people to become better drivers . USE CAUTION.

Retraining the Mind

Mantram repetition considers two kinds of thinking⁶. The first is 'reflective' thinking, or directed attention, where we are intentional in our thinking and have more control over our thoughts. The second type of thinking is "reflexive thinking", or automatic thinking, which is an automatic reaction to a stimulus, such as a situation or event and how we perceive it.

Mantram Repetition is a way of interrupting the automatic reaction of the stress response, which gives us time to intentionally respond with directed thought and attention.

Reflection:

Mantram is a useful tool for training the mind to pause so that you can intentionally respond rather than automatically react to a situation. Use this space to reflect on a time when you reacted quickly without thinking. If you had paused before reacting, giving yourself time to respond with intention, how would the situation have changed?

One Pointed Attention

 [Training Videos](#)

Repeating your mantram is a reminder to be present and focus on just a single thought. One-pointed attention is the opposite of multitasking. It is a myth that multitasking saves time. Doing more than one thing actually takes longer. One-pointed attention is needed within the mind to repeat the mantram—this internal one-pointedness can be reinforced by only focusing on a single task at a time.

Zoom Fatigue

In the world of the COVID-19 Pandemic, multitasking is reinforced even further by the multiple modalities of engagement in a virtual meeting, such as a chat box, virtual activities, and even simply looking at yourself on camera⁷. The ability to turn the camera off also encourages attending meetings and working on another task simultaneously. This can result in “Zoom Fatigue” which can be prevented by:

- Intentionally engaging in meetings rather than multitasking
- Placing a sticky note over your face on the screen
- Repeating your mantram when you notice your mind wandering—use it as a tool to re-direct your attention back to the meeting

Reflection:

Multitasking is valued in our busy society so it is no surprise that we frequently struggle with focusing our attention on only one task in a given moment. One-pointed attention is strengthened through the practice of mantram repetition. Reflect on your daily routine and consider the situations in which you tend to multitask most often. How might these situations benefit from practicing one-pointed attention?

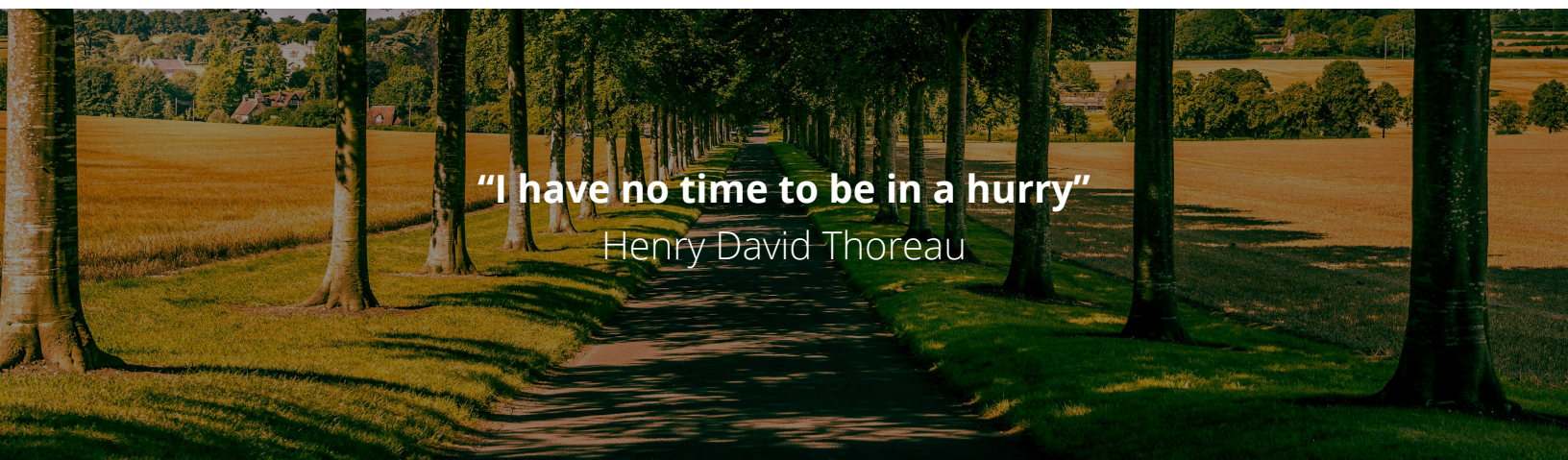
Intentional Practice

Choose a task you've been putting off. Set a timer for 30 minutes and make a commitment to disregard any distractions outside distractions (i.e., phone). Give your full undivided attention to the task at hand, without interruptions. Stick with it. Notice your thoughts and feelings. Use the space below to reflect on the thoughts and feelings that surfaced while you were completing your task.

Slowing Down

➤ [Training Videos](#)

Similar to one-pointed attention, slowing down also involves intentionality and being present while performing a task. A hurried lifestyle and the push to be more productive can lead to increased stress and its physical symptoms or “hurry sickness”- irritability, trouble sleeping, fatigue. Silently repeating your mantram helps to slow down the mind and increase awareness and intentionality. Externally, one can practice slowing down by prioritizing their responsibilities and tasks so there is less to accomplish each day, naturally creating a slower paced lifestyle⁸.



Reflection:

Take a few minutes to consider your priorities. Take a snapshot of your daily or weekly routine and reflect on the tasks to which you devote the most time, energy, money, or mental space. Write these tasks down in the column on the left side below. In the column on the right side, write the tasks you will prioritize using mantram repetition to create a slower and more intentional way of life.

My Current Priorities

My Intentional Priorities

Putting It All Together



In addition to mantram repetition being a tool for emotional regulation⁹ and stress response, it can also help build healthier habits. Mantram repetition, slowing down, and one-pointed attention set the stage for building healthier habits by creating space for intentional decision-making and prioritization.

Writing the Mantram:

Repeatedly writing your mantram can be a useful tool to cope with unhealthy habits. Think about an unhealthy habit that you want to break. Use the space below to write your mantram—intentionally focus on writing each word, letter by letter. Once the space is filled, take time to think about the decision you would like to make and the potential consequences. Take more time writing your mantram, if needed.

Consistent practice is key to making mantram repetition a habit in your life. There are likely times in your daily schedule in which you are doing a mechanical task (such as brushing your teeth or washing the dishes), where your mind is not focused on a specific thought or on the task at hand. These times are points that it might be easier to begin implementing mantram so that it becomes an automatic practice—a habit! Consider using a log to keep track of the number of times per day you practice mantram. This will help you to truly evaluate your mantram practice and determine the ways in which you are implementing it well, as well as additional places in your life it can be practiced so that it becomes a habitual method of stress management.

Additional Resources

Books

Easwaran, E. (2013). Strength in the storm: Transform stress and live in balance and peace of mind. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.

Easwaran, E. (2008). The mantram handbook (5th ed.). Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mantram_Handbook

The Power of the Mantram (free newsletter from Blue Mountain Center of Meditation)
<http://bmcmwebsite.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/bm-journal/2013/2013Autumn.pdf>

PsychArmor Mantram Repetition Series for Military Caregivers

[What Mantram Is and How to Choose One](#)

[Slowing Down](#)

[One Pointed Attention](#)

[Putting It All Together](#)

Jill Bormann, PhD, RN, FAAN (www.jillbormann.com) -

Jill Bormann offers consulting and coaching services to individuals and organizations to get the benefits from implementing mindful techniques from the Mantram Repetition Program (MRP).



References

Mantram Repetition for Self-Care:

1. Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving. (October 2020). Caregivers in Crisis: Caregiving in the Time of COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.rosalynncarter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Caregivers-in-Crisis-Report-October-2020-10-22-20.pdf>
2. Bormann JE, Warren KA, Regalbutto L, Glaser D, Kelly A, Schnack J, & Hinton L. A Spiritually Based Caregiver Intervention With Telephone Delivery for Family Caregivers of Veterans With Dementia. *Family & community health* 2009; 32(4):345–353.
3. Bormann JE, Kane JJ, & Oman D. (2020). Mantram Repetition: A portable practice for being mindful. *Mindfulness*, 11(8), 2031 - 2033. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01440-4>

Benefits of Mantram Repetition:

4. Staples J. K., (2018, Spring). The science of mantra. *Yoga Therapy Today*, 14-16.
5. Bormann JE, Smith TL, Becker S, Gershwin M, Pada L, Grudzinski AH, & Nurmi EA. Efficacy of Frequent Mantram Repetition on Stress, Quality of Life, and Spiritual Well-Being in Veterans. *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 2005;23(4):395–414.

Retraining the Mind

6. Cousins N. *Anatomy of an illness: As perceived by the patient*. New York (NY): WW Norton & Company;1979.

One Pointed Attention

7. Bormann JE. (2020). Video Conferencing or Zoom Fatigue. Virtual Presentation.

Slowing Down

8. Easwaran, D. (2006). *Take your time: How to find patience, peace & meaning*. Blue Mountain Center of Meditation; Tamales, CA.

Putting It All Together

9. Bormann, J. E. (April 2014). Practice Intentionality & Presence with Mantram Repetition. American Holistic Nurses Association. Retrieved from https://35840e29-4fe4-4ac0-b15b-f03ee2240547.filesusr.com/ugd/d2194e_f6d41f661b3d49a9bae2d51f6a01ad04.pdf