

<http://prenatalyogacenter.com/blog/mantras-a-tool-for-birth-and-beyond/>

## **Mantras: A Tool for Birth and Beyond!**

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About 5 years ago, I was on a bike trip through Tuscany. When I was planning this trip all I heard about were the beautiful hills of Tuscany and the great food and wine that I would enjoy. Well, the food and wine were magnificent, but the beautiful hills of Tuscany were more like beautiful mountains! (At least to this novice rider.) I encountered many moments when I literally had to muster up all my strength to climb the hills. After a while, and after a few break downs- yes, I walked my bike up a few hills- I started to develop a few coping skills to calm and focus my mind to help me conquer each hill. I was using mantras to help my mind and body focus on the task at hand. To this day I remember encouraging myself up one particularly steep and challenging hill repeating "At the top, I will go down" over and over until I hit the peak, and enjoyed the blissful of cruise down hill. Since riding through the "hills" of Tuscany, I have gone on many bike trips and used many mantras to focus my mind and encourage my body to go a little further than I believed I could (and at times wanted) to go.

I often talk about the power and usefulness of these mantras or self affirmations in class. One student admitted to me that she thought the idea was kind of corny, until she used a mantra through several hours of her labor. In my work as a doula, I have witnessed women spontaneously repeating such phrases as "I'm ok, my baby is ok" or "My body can open."

### **Why Mantras Work!**

A mantra is a single word or phrase that can be chanted out loud or repeated internally as an object of meditation. Traditionally - the word "Mantra" is a sanskrit word that is the culmination of two words, "manas" meaning mind and "tra" meaning tool. A tool for the mind!

In some traditions, mantras can be elaborate phrases that honor a deity and are chanted out loud. In other traditions, a mantra can be a single syllable like "Om", "yam", or "shreem". It is believed the outward expression of the mantra manifests a healing vibration through the body. According to Ed and Deb Shapiro, authors of *Be the Change: How Meditation Can Transform You and the World*. The Shapiros claim that mantras work on the brain in a particular way to elevate us to a spiritually altered state (<http://life.gaiam.com/article/how-do-mantras-really-work>).

With that in mind, it is understandable how mantras can help create a focal point for meditation. By meditation, I do not mean sitting quietly in a room with your eyes closed chanting or "oming." Instead, I am defining meditation simply a state of focused concentration that can be used at any time. The mantras that I have witnessed and teach as a prenatal yoga teacher, childbirth educator and doula do not follow a specific tradition, but are used more like self affirmations. They are often personal and pertain to a particular situation. In my case, I used my mantra to help focus my mind and body to keep moving forward up a hill, and I frequently use mantras to help relax and stop the

fluctuations of my mind. My clients have used mantras to move away from fear, quiet their minds and embody their capability during labor.

Here are some stories about how mantras have helped some of the members of our community.

*Labor is just a series of one-minute challenges. This was an incredibly inspirational and empowering concept for me during my labor. As the contractions intensified, I just kept repeating the mantra, "I can do anything for one minute, one minute." Without that piece of mind, I'm not sure I could have achieved the natural labor that I wanted. In a nutshell, I was able to labor at home for a long time using the yoga breathing and that particular mantra, got to the hospital at 1PM and gave birth at 3PM to a beautiful baby boy named Emmitt. Karin Portlock*

*I think for me the scariest thing about my first labor was the feeling of not being in control of my body. Every time I had a contraction, even though I was trying my best to breathe through it, the pain was so great that in the moments after it, I was freaking out that the next contraction was right around the corner. In no way was I able to quiet my body and mind and recharge in between contractions. With this labor I was prepared. My mantra, which I said to myself during every single contraction was "this time I am in control." I don't know why, but I was able to get through them so much easier and I was actually able to focus enough to relax my pelvic floor during it, and then I was able to quiet my mind and distract myself in the minutes afterward. Anna Kirker*

*That night at about 12:30am, I knew I was in active labor and it was definitely going to be the time. At first I was shocked by the contractions, but I kept thinking about breathing, using my positions and you guys reminding me to go into myself, pick a mantra and like Deb has has many times "Anything was possible for a period of time" and "this too shall pass". Kresta Tyler Johnson*

When allowed to spontaneously emerge, a mantra can be a reflection of your true inner teacher-yourself. You are allowing your inner voice to emerge and carry you through a challenging moment, or help quiet the mind from chaos and distraction. Through this intentional focus- real change can occur.