

What Are My Kids Talking About?

Thank you Amanda James for sharing this with us!

It happens every time – kids come home from their Yoga practice with new words they are eager to use, but unsure how to explain. To help you talk about your young yogis new-found knowledge, here is a quick review of a few of the common words we use in our Yoga classes:

Japa Beads: Used as a meditation tool, Japa beads (or Mala beads) provide a tactile focal point for the repetition of a mantra. In kid's classes, we often use "Peace begins with me" as our repeating phrase. Each time we say the phrase in our minds, we move to the next bead. Japa beads can be quite intricate and lovely, with up to 108 beads. But we just use the Mardi Gras versions in class.

Karma Yoga: In our Yoga class, we practice Hatha Yoga, which includes movement, breath, and meditation. Another kind of Yoga is called Karma Yoga and it is the Yoga of service. When you do good deeds from your heart (and NOT to get complimented or paid), you are practicing Karma Yoga.

Kirtan: A call-and-response chant. I close each class with a Kirtan, "May the whole world/Be filled with peace and joy/love and light/And lots of peaceful children."

Mandala: A Sanskrit word meaning "circle", mandalas are visual cues for the brain to calm and center. Cultures throughout history and across the globe have used mandalas. In class, we shared several varieties of mandalas, both human-made (from stones like Stonehenge or with sand, rice, and seeds) and found in nature (the spirals on a pineapple or scales on a chameleon's eyes). Coloring a mandala may help settle kids' mind during periods of stress. (www.free-mandala.com/en/start.html)


Mantra: A phrase repeated over and over, providing a path to meditation. We usually use a "4-finger meditation": a four word phrase, and as you say each word, you touch a finger to your thumb-pads.

Meditation: In class, we learn that meditation allows our brain to think of just one thing at a time. Usually our minds are cluttered with thoughts, ideas, lists, worries, etc. During meditation, we have the chance to "watch one channel" with our minds. Kids learn several ways to meditate: "Peace Begins With Me", chanting, Pompom Poppers, Tingsha bells, and many others. Ask your kids to show you how to stop your own "koo koo head."

Mudra: A mudra is a hand gesture, like a "thumbs-up" or the "o.k." sign. In Yoga, mudras have great power. The mudra we use most commonly is the "Gyan Mudra", simply your thumb pad touching your index finger pad. Your thumb represents the universe and your index finger

represents you, so it is basically you connecting with the universe. It promotes a settling feeling, like taking you home. (www.healing.about.com/od/east/ig/Mudra-Gallery/)

Namaste: This is my favorite word to teach kids, as it is such a beautiful notion. Simply put, when you bow and say, “Namaste”, you are saying, “The light in me bows to the light in you”. In other words, all the good things I love about me, I am able to see in you.

Om:  If you could stand on top of the highest mountain and listen to the sounds of the earth, you would hear an “Om”. Everything creates this sound: the hum of the computer, cars driving by on the highway, bagpipes, mosquitoes. Om has no English meaning, it is simply the vibration of the universe and when we chant “Om”, the vibrations we create are healing. We use this chant at the beginning of class to settle the energy, and at the end to come together in harmony.

Secret Garden: In adult Yoga, this portion of class is called Savasana (which literally translates to “corpse pose”). It is the quiet meditation at the end of a physical Yoga practice where you rest comfortably on your back with your eyes closed. With kids, I first guide them through a relaxation sequence to let each part of their body rest. Then the kids are invited to visit their Secret Garden. This garden can be anywhere they can imagine, with whatever sights, sounds, smells, etc. they find peaceful. The Secret Garden can sometimes be a challenge for kids (and adults, too), but it is one of the most important parts of a Yoga practice. It is a wonderful tool for children to learn so they can find a quiet, safe place in their mind whenever they need it. Ask your child where their Secret Garden was after class (but know that some don’t want to share – they like to keep it a secret!)

Shanti: Simply put, this means “Peace.” It is part of a closing chant, “Om Shanti.”

Tingsha: These are tiny cymbals joined by a leather strap or chain that, when struck, produce a lovely tone. I use the tingshas to promote mindfulness, as it takes a great deal of concentration to strike them just right. It is another form of meditation.

Yoga: Yoga is so much more than just turning your body into a pretzel and chanting. Yoga means “union”, a coming together of light and dark, of grounding and lifting, of mind and body. I explain to the kids that Yoga was invented to allow the body to be calm enough to meditate. Work the body into stillness so the mind can be still as well.