

## Week 4: Meditation and Open-Eyed Practices

Dear Ones,

Please listen to the call one more time this week.

### Daily Meditation Practice

We'll continue our daily Meditation on the Breath and HamSa mantra flowing through the Heart and Ajna chakras. However, I encourage you to work with one of the meditations we did in class during your second session, or as an alternative in your morning practice. The instructions for these meditations are below. (And if this type of breath work is not comfortable for you it's fine to stick with Nadi Shodhana or Ujjayi).

#### ***Kapalabhati or Bhastrika Pranayama before meditation:***

For those of you who are comfortable with it, I suggest substituting *Kapalabhati* or *Bhastrika Pranayama* (Breath of Fire) for *Nadi Shodhana* this week. Do this in the spirit of experimentation—but keep at it for several days or all week, because it can take a while to “get it.” *Kapalabhati* is energizing and heating, adding Shakti to your meditation. It gives a lot of power to your core. It is also a practice for strengthening the digestive “fire”, cleansing the blood, and especially, for dispelling samskaras, especially stuck emotions in the lower chakras.

If you have a detached retina, have seizure disorders, or are pregnant, it is not recommended that you do this breath.

It is better to do this pranayama on an empty stomach.

Posture is crucial. Make sure that your posture and seat are firm and stable while you do this practice. Sit very straight, pulling your torso up through the crown. This will fully free the diaphragm and allow you to do the pumping motion with the inhalation and exhalation. Remember to soften the belly, shoulders and arms.

In *Kapalabhati*, the inhalation and exhalation should be even.

- a) Place your hands on the lower abdomen, to help you bring your breath down to this section of the belly.
- b) Aiming your attention at the lower belly, inhale audibly and forcefully through the nose. The inhalation and exhalation should be even. Start slowly, pumping your breath and your belly for about 15 breaths. Relax after the last inhalation and allow the diaphragm to naturally bring the breath in, before starting another round.

- c) Some of you might want to do the *kumbhaka* (retention) at the end of each round. Start with a four-count, using your heartbeat to count breaths, and gradually increase, making sure you are comfortable. The breath retention part of this practice is considered more advanced, so if you're not used to pranayama, add this mindfully, and don't hold the breath for too long.
- d) Do no more than three rounds at a time.

We have put up two YouTube videos of a Kundalini Yoga teachers demonstrating this pranayama. They are on the Class Student page of the website. I find this to be a simple and accessible learning video, but there are others on YouTube as well. It's good to learn this with a visual demonstration and clear instructions

## Additional Meditation Practices

The two following meditations are similar to ones we did in Tuesday's class. They are expansions or variants of the core practice we are doing this week. I suggest that you choose one and practice it in your second session of the day.

Both of these practices can be considered extensions or modifications of the Ajna-Heart focus we've been doing for the last few weeks.

## The Soft-Palate/Ajna Chakra Practice

*We did this in class.*

The soft palate is the seat of the Talu Chakra (palatal chakra) which is the lower part of the Ajna Chakra. This practice activates the limbic brain and helps clear the brain stem. It is also the seat in the body where the subtle power of inner visioning can be activated. Soft-Palate focus both kindles awareness of the Ajna and triggers your ability to perceive subtle forms through the inner sense of vision. As you practice this, allow your awareness of the soft palate to extend upwards to the region above it, which is the Ajna. The Ajna Chakra is in the middle of the head, parallel to the forehead, about ¼ inch above the eyebrows.

Find your soft palate by curling back your tongue and touching the tip to the soft palate, which is towards the back of the throat, just past the bonier hard palate.

Soften the face, shoulders and neck. If you feel tightness arising during the practice, remember to soften.

Inhale through the nostrils, aiming the breath at the soft palate. The touch of the breath should activate your awareness of it, giving you a felt sense of this region. With

the exhalation, merge your attention in the whole region of the soft palate and the area above.

Include the mantra Hum with the inhalation, and Suh with the exhalation. The “m” sound in Hum should be nasalized, not so much a hard “m” as a nasal “ng”, which at some point you may feel actually vibrating the soft palate. With Suh, allow the mantra and the exhalation to pulsate through the soft palate, spreading your awareness into the region above.

This is a strong practice, and you may feel buzzy or spacey as you do it. You may also feel the energy rising to your crown. If you get a headache while doing the practice, stop. However, a slight feeling of pressure or discomfort in the region is not a sign that something is wrong, but a sign that the chakra is being opened.

After a few minutes, add a 2-4 count pause after the exhalation, and focus on what you “see” in the region of the soft palate/Ajna chakra. As you relax into the process you will begin to notice increasingly subtle sensations in the region, and perhaps subtle illumination and sensations of pleasure. Many people report that over time they get a visual sense of a subtly circular region in the head, which can be seen as a bounded sensation of illumination or simply felt as luminous clarity. This can become a focal point for meditation. *(As I say, this may be sensed visually or feel like more of a sensation of pulsation or expansive touch.)* In other words, what you “see” up here is what Patanjali called an “inner sense object”, meaning a form that can only be perceived by the inner senses. Focus on such an inner vision or sensation of touch can carry your mind inward, creating a sense of peace and inner flow. It’s a very satisfying way to meditate, that can take you deep, and will ultimately make you aware of the pure Awareness that is the substratum of the mind. The visual will usually morph, appearing and dissolving or changing shape, and often give rise to a sense of pure space or awareness. Let yourself stay present to it with soft focus, letting go of thoughts, and see where it takes you.

As you become anchored in this practice, you may notice that the energy of prana—the subtle luminosity or feeling of pulsation there—has a tendency to expand, such that you begin to feel a presence there that opens past the boundaries of your skull. This is a sign that you have transitioned into the subtle body, which both interpenetrates and extends beyond the physical body. Here, you can release and just rest there, letting what happens happen, and letting go of thoughts when they arise. You may notice that the thoughts seem to be “within” the field of subtle awareness, observable as phenomena that arise and subside.

Journal about the practice when you are done.

## Meditation in the Lotus of the Heart

Find the anchor point on the chest: about 4-5 finger widths above the U-Shaped notch that connects the ribs. This is just above the solar plexus. Bring your awareness inside from that point. the heart center extends upward from there. For some people, it is easier to find higher in the chest, beneath the sternum.

Begin by breathing into the Heart with Hum and Suh, feeling the touch of the breath flowing into this region. Feel the breath as a tide that rolls into the heart and rolls out. As you settle into this meditation, sense or imagine the presence in the heart of a subtle luminosity. It may be “seen” or experienced as a spaciousness or as an inner feeling of energy, pulsation and presence. Give yourself time to sense into this felt state in the heart.

If it feels natural, let each exhalation gently expand the feeling of the heart center past the skin boundary, so that it feels as if your torso is a soft cocoon of energy and subtle luminosity that you can rest in. Let each breath softly pulse through the whole region, settling deeper into the heart, as if you are rocking on the waves of breath in the heart.

### ***To sense Presence in the heart, I offer a couple of suggestions.***

From time to time, silently “call” the to the heart, “Beloved” and notice the feeling called forth as you do.

Or have the thought “I Am”, sensing it being felt or spoken within the heart. Have the feeling that the words I AM are a direct voice expressing the Self, the deep essential Being within the heart. Then let go of the words and feel your being, your self-sense, extending through the heart. Take rest there.

For some of you, it might be powerful to gradually open into the back heart. With the inhalation, allow the breath to flow backwards, as if opening through the back body into the region behind the body. sense the sensations at your back, and within those sensations, feel that you are being embraced from behind. You might feel sensations of pleasure or lightness there, or simply a sense of presence or vibratory energy. Don’t expect anything, just sense into that region behind you, as if it is a backrest that supports you from behind. See if you can allow that backrest to reveal itself as a loving Presence that protects and holds you. Connect yourself to that presence and see if you can merge your self- sense into it.

If you have a deity or guru practice, breathe the feeling of deity presence into the heart, and merge your focus into that sense of deity presence as an inner, comforting refuge—friend, mother/father.

## **Working with Emotions, Moods, and Charged Thoughts through Mindful Noticing It**

As with your practice last week, when emotions arise or when a thought has particular “charge” to it, see if you can practice witnessing it and simply acknowledging its emotional quality. As in “Anger arising.” “Dullness arising.” “Worry arising.” Some moods or emotions will catch you, and you’ll find yourself identifying with them. When you get “caught” by a feeling or a sticky idea, notice the state of mind that arises. As soon as you become aware that you’ve been caught, label the sticky mood or thought as Shakti, and see what happens.

## **Open-Eyed Practices**

Continue the open-eyed practices from last week: mantra japa, offering your activities to the divine or for the sake of humanity, asking to be shown the presence of grace in a situation, holding the thought, “All that I see, hear, touch and feel is made of Shakti, divine conscious energy.”

Continue to work with the Four Attitudes. When a bad feeling comes up, notice it, particularly the sensations around it. Soften your eyes and your shoulders and notice whether this helps soften your internal experience.

Then, spend a moment calling forth compassionate acceptance, perhaps thinking, “I accept the presence of this bad feeling, and offer affection to myself even while feeling uncomfortable or out of sorts.” Or practice offering kindness to yourself: “May I be happy, may I free of fear or anger, may I be loving, may I be loved.” Or use your own well-wishing words. Make a point of offering words of loving kindness to others also and notice how this affects your mood.