

## Week 5: Meditation and Open-Eyed Practices

Please listen to the call one more time this week.

### Daily Meditation Practice

**Pranayama:** Some of you may want to replace the *Nadi Shodhana* or *Ujjayi* practices at the beginning of meditation with a soft three-rounds of *Kapalabhati*, followed by a couple of rounds of *Ujjayi*. Notice the different effects of each practice on your meditation, your breathing, and your mood. Journal about this after meditation.

**Meditation:** This week, as your main daily meditation, I encourage you to practice the Lotus of the Heart meditation that we did in class. You can do this as your daily practice, or in a second session that same day. If you are comfortable with the Soft Palate/Ajna Chakra sequence, you might do the Heart practice in one session, and the Soft Palate practice in the other one. Or, if you are sitting for a longer session (more than 40 minutes) you might want to begin meditation with the Soft Palate practice, for 10-15 minutes, then when it feels right, inhale down into the heart and continue the session with the Heart Lotus practice. As we open each of these centers, we discover that when joined together, they enhance each other. Both of these practices can also be used as enhancements for the core Ajna/Heart practice we have been doing in previous classes.

The instructions are in last week's homework handout and included below. I also recommend doing at least a few sessions of practice with the Soft Palate/Ajna Chakra instructions.

I've also included instructions for the *Meditation with Your Enlightened Self* that we did at the end of class at the end of this document. If you resonated with this practice, I highly recommend that you work with it a few times this week.

As you practice, consider what your experience is with each practice, and journal about it. Tracking your experience with a meditation practice is important and will actually allow you to experience more creativity and agency in your practice.

Questions to ask yourself after a meditation session:

- What was the energetic experience of this meditation?
- Did the point of concentration we worked with help my focus? Did I enjoy it?
- Was there a sense of subtle luminosity? A feeling of pleasure or joy? What were the qualities of them, if they appeared?

These two practices, when done over a period of time, are said to engender light (*vyoma*) and joy (*ananda*). The light may be actually “seen” with the subtle visionary sense, or the light may manifest as a sense of clarity and insight. Joy may manifest as a sense of contentment, tenderness or relaxation. If you become aware of a sense of luminosity or happiness during one of these meditations, let yourself rest in that.

**Question:** Describe your experience during meditation. Is my experience with this technique different than when I practice with the Ajna/Heart practice of the first few weeks? In what way?

### **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” 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,

*Below, are some of the instructions from last week, for your convenience.*

### **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 I 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 Practice**

### **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 on the Form of Your Enlightened Self**

Based on Sutra I:37 (Meditation on the mind of a being who is free from desires).

Spend a few minutes grounding yourself by following the breath as it flows in and out through the heart center.

Imagine that you are seated face to face with the enlightened version of yourself. This is your own form, irradiated with positive feelings, with light, or simply with clarity and pulsing energy. Sense the freedom and expansive sweetness within this vision of

yourself. This is the most alive and mature version of you, the you who has fulfilled his or her fullest spiritual potential.

What is the feeling of sitting before this being?

Connect your heart with their heart.

Inhaling feel that you draw in the enlightened loving qualities of the enlightened self in front of you.

Exhaling breathe back affection, gratitude, and whatever other feelings arise.

Finally, inhale the presence of that being into your heart, and feel that the enlightened you spreads through your body, becoming a full part of you.

## **Open-Eyed Practices**

Make a point of consciously stopping every hour (you can set a phone alarm to remind yourself) and take a moment to notice your own mood or thought stream at that moment. Then, ask yourself, “Does this thought or mood take me closer or farther away from an ‘enlightened’ state?” If the answer is that it seems to be taking you farther away, ask yourself how you can work with that state to transform it or use it as the basis for self-inquiry. Often, you’ll notice that one of the Four Attitudes of Sutra I-33 is particularly relevant—and then take a moment or two to invoke and practice it!

Whenever possible, continue the other 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.”